

MIRJAM A. TUK

# Is Friendship Silent When Money Talks?

How People Respond to  
Word-of-Mouth Marketing



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Is Friendship Silent when Money Talks?  
How People Respond to Word-of-Mouth Marketing

Speelt vriendschap geen rol meer als er geld in het spel komt?  
Hoe mensen reageren op mond-tot-mond marketing campagnes

Proefschrift

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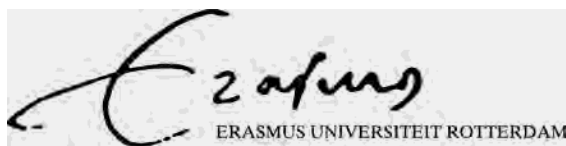
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Promotoren:

Prof.dr.ir. A. Smidts

Prof.dr. D.H.J. Wigboldus

Overige leden:

Prof.dr. S. Dewitte

Prof.dr. D.L. van Knippenberg

Prof.dr. S.M.J. van Osselaer

Copromotor:

Dr.ir. P.W.J. Verlegh

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Imagine someone tells you enthusiastically about a new magazine he or she recently discovered. “It is very interesting and contains a lot of articles that you would love to read!” What do you think about this person and the recommendation? Do your judgments depend on your relationship with this person (e.g., friend, classmate, or salesperson)? How would you evaluate the recommendation if you were to find out that this enthusiastic person receives a financial reward for every subscriber he recruits? In other words, is a recommendation that is stimulated with a reward still an effective and persuasive recommendation?

Rewarding current customers for talking about a product or a service is becoming more and more an implemented marketing strategy (Ryu & Feick, 2007). This has been labeled word-of-mouth marketing or buzz marketing (Rosen, 2000). These rewards have raised several new questions. Some recent research (e.g., Ryu & Feick; Wirtz & Chew, 2002) focused on the following questions: Are rewards effective in stimulating people to talk about a product? And if they are, to whom do people talk? Are recommendations that are rewarded directed to the same customers as non-rewarded (“traditional”) recommendations? In this dissertation, we will focus on the impact of rewarded recommendations on the recommendation target. How do rewarded recommendations exactly differ from non-rewarded recommendations, and what is the impact of these differences on the effectiveness of these recommendations, both in terms of agent evaluation and in terms of product evaluations?

In Chapter 1, an overview of the existing research on word of mouth (WOM) and rewarded WOM will be given. This literature shows that providing a reward for a recommendation indeed leads to an increase in recommendations, and that (part of) these recommendations are directed to other people than to those whom non-rewarded recommendations are directed.

This leads to the identification of several factors on which rewarded WOM differs from non-rewarded WOM, both related to the relationship between the recommendation agent and target, and to the reward as additional stimulus. We argue that the financial reward introduces a sales aspect into an interaction that is usually based on friendship norms. Furthermore, the reward as additional motive to talk about a product, might lead people to question the trustworthiness of the recommendation agent. A last important factor on which rewarded recommendations seem to differ from non-rewarded recommendations, is the observation that rewarded recommendations are relatively more often directed towards people with whom the recommendation agent has a less close relationship (i.e., weak ties). In the empirical chapters of this dissertation, the impact of these factors on both agent evaluations and recommendation effectiveness is investigated.

### ***Word of Mouth***

Word of mouth is very common in everyday interactions. A great product experience, very friendly (or unfriendly) service personnel, discovering a shop that sells items you know your friend is interested in: these are all reasons for people to talk to other people. By doing so, they engage in WOM.

Word of mouth has been defined in a variety of ways. Richins (1984) speaks of WOM as a form of interpersonal communication among consumers concerning their personal experiences with a firm or a product. Bone (1995) defines WOM as interpersonal communications in which none of the participants are marketing sources (p. 213). Westbrook (1987) defines WOM as "...informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers" (p. 261). Furthermore, Arndt (1967b) characterizes WOM as "oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, a product, or a service" (p.3). To summarize, there are many definitions for WOM, but across these definitions, three main characteristics of WOM are prevalent.

- First, WOM concerns communication about products or services, or related issues such as their sellers.
- Second, WOM concerns interpersonal communication, which nowadays can also include forums on the internet (i.e., interpersonal communications in a written format instead of in a spoken format), but does not include for example mass media or newspaper communications.
- Third, and most important for investigating the effects of rewarding WOM recommendations, there are no marketing parties *assumed* to be involved in these communications.

This last characteristic is also apparent in the emphasis on trustworthiness and credibility of WOM in the literature. Silverman (2001) stresses that “far and away the best way to make the decision easier is for a *trusted advisor to encourage the customer to use the product, i.e., word of mouth*” (p. 47). Wirtz and Chew (2002) state that “customers pay more attention to WOM, because it is perceived as credible and custom-tailored, and generated by people who are perceived as having no self-interest in pushing a product” (p. 141). Furthermore, Dichter (1966) also states that “such intimate relationships created a feeling of trust and security and reduced the confusions of cold ‘commercialism’” (p. 147). The perceived absence of marketing influence and the high degree of trustworthiness of WOM are related to each other, and both factors are affected when recommendations are stimulated by rewards. This brings us to the definition of word-of-mouth marketing. The Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) defines word-of-mouth marketing as “giving people a reason to talk about your products, and making it easier for the conversation to take place” (see <http://www.womma.org/wom101/>). This definition regards basically all firm induced strategies that have the intention to increase the likelihood that people will talk about their specific products. From this perspective, rewarded WOM can be seen as WOM with an additional (firm induced) motive. In the current dissertation, we will focus on (financially) rewarded WOM, and wherever we mention WOM marketing or buzz marketing, we specifically refer to WOM recommendations that are financially



rewarded. This brings us to the motives of people to recommend a product to others.

### ***Motives for Word of Mouth***

Dichter (1966) and, more recently, Sundaram, Mitra and Webster (1998; see also Verlegh, Buijs, & Zethof, 2007), examined the underlying motives of people to engage in WOM. Sundaram and colleagues reported that the motives for people to engage in WOM can be categorized into four motives for positive WOM and four motives for negative WOM. Motives to engage in positive WOM include altruism (helping another customer with product related decisions), product involvement (talking about the product because of personal involvement with this product), self-enhancement (projecting themselves as intelligent shoppers) and helping the company (recommending a specific company because you want to help this company in the first place). Motives to engage in negative WOM also include altruism (make sure another customer does not have the same bad experience as you had), anxiety reduction (sharing a negative experience can help to regulate the negative emotions that accompany this negative experience), vengeance (retaliation against the company) and advice seeking (obtaining advice how to resolve the problems). Emotions are another reason to engage in WOM. Derbaix and Vanhamme (2003) showed that surprise is a motive to engage in both positive and negative WOM. Wetzer, Zeelenberg, and Pieters (2007) showed that motives to engage in negative WOM differ systematically depending on the specific negative emotion that is experienced, for example, angry customers want to vent their negative feelings and take revenge, whereas disappointed customers want to warn others.

A reward can be seen as an additional motive for WOM. From a broader perspective, a (financial) reward is both a self-related motive (someone has a personal gain) and a company-related or product-related motive (it is a specific company that wants a person to talk about a specific product). However, a financial reward has never been explicitly mentioned as a motive for people to engage in WOM. This might be explained by the fact that a reward is usually

just an additional stimulus, and never the main force that causes people to talk about a product (e.g., Wirtz & Chew, 2002).

### ***Effects of Word of Mouth***

Why all this interest in WOM? Is WOM that effective? Previous research suggests that this is indeed the case. Arndt (1967) and Brown and Reingen (1987), for example, showed that WOM is a source where consumers frequently rely on when considering a new product or service. Furthermore, Hogan, Lemon and Libai (2004) even argue that WOM effects should be taken into account when computing the lifetime value of a customer. They argue that it is not only important to calculate the effects of advertising but also to take into account the amount that people will talk about the purchased product, due to this advertising. Dye (2000) also suggests that approximately two-thirds of the U.S. economy is affected by WOM, and Silverman (2001) calls WOM “the most powerful force in the marketplace”.

However, this huge impact also has a negative side effect, since people also talk about products or services when they are unsatisfied. There is research that shows that negative WOM is more influential than positive WOM (Bone, 1995; but see East, Hammond, & Wright, 2007, who show that positive WOM is more prevalent than negative WOM), and research that examines negative WOM in particular (Arndt, 1967a; Richins, 1983, 1984; Smith & Vogt, 1995; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Some general conclusions from this research are that people are less willing to buy a product after a negative recommendation, and that negative recommendations in general have more impact than positive ones. And, as Ward and Ostrom showed, this difference in impact between negative and positive WOM might both increase and reinforce itself in web-based communications. Dissatisfied consumers nowadays construct complaint websites to spread their complaints over the whole world. On these sites, they find other dissatisfied consumers, and their interactions reinforce their antipathy against the firm. This all indicates that both positive and negative WOM can have a lot of impact, and that managing WOM is of interest for marketers.

### ***Source Characteristics***

Previous research has examined a variety of source characteristics. Perhaps the best researched source factor is the tie strength between the referring agent and the referral target. Granovetter (1973) defined tie strength as “a combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (p. 1361). This is a continuum, but usually split into a dichotomy of strong and weak ties. Strong ties are close friends and family members, and weak ties are people you interact with less often and on a less intimate level, such as class mates. Granovetter argued that weak ties are especially useful to communicate information between different networks of strong ties. In line with this, Brown and Reingen (1987) showed with a network analysis that weak ties indeed serve a bridging function between clusters of strong ties, but that people are more likely to search and spread information within a strong tie network. Strong tie WOM thus seems to have a stronger impact, but this impact is limited to a relatively small number of people, whereas weak ties have a weaker impact, but can reach a relatively larger number of people. Goldenberg, Libai and Muller (2001) added to this knowledge by showing that weak ties become relatively more influential when the size of someone’s personal network decreases (there are relatively more interactions with weak ties when people have smaller networks of strong ties).

Most research has focused on strong ties, and differences that exist between various strong tie sources. For example, Gilly, Graham, Wolfinger, and Yale (1998) investigated a variety of source characteristics, in combination with seeker characteristics. They showed that people prefer information from people whom they perceive to be similar to themselves (perceived homophily), and people who are perceived as an expert (which is also supported by Bone, 1995), an opinion leader, or a market maven (Feick & Price, 1987). In line with this, Feick and Higie (1992) showed that people prefer information from people similar to themselves when it concerns products with a high preference heterogeneity (i.e., preferences vary a lot between people, and similar people are most likely to have the same preference for these products, such as

movies), whereas people prefer expert sources when the product has low preference heterogeneity (i.e., people have the same preferences, and an expert source thus contributes most to the information already available, such as video equipment).

### ***Word-of-Mouth Marketing***

Besides obtaining more insight into various aspects and dimensions of WOM, there is one general conclusion that can be drawn from the existing literature: WOM is very effective in influencing product judgments and purchase intentions (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Hogan et al., 2004). This large impact on purchase intentions and product judgments has raised the interest of marketers in obtaining more insight into how to influence and stimulate WOM (Dye, 2000; Silverman, 2001). One of the ways by which marketers try to encourage consumers to talk about their products, is by rewarding recommendations. There are various types of reward programs (see Bialogorsky, Gerstner, & Libai, 2001; Ryu & Feick, 2007). For example, the current customer can receive a reward for providing a company with names and (email) addresses of friends who might potentially be interested, or for effective recommendations which result in a new customer. Furthermore, the reward can be provided to both the referring customer and to the new customer. The latter strategy might especially be successful when the threshold to start using a certain product is relatively high. The referring agent is rewarded for the recommendation, and the reward for the new customer can be just the additional push necessary to get him or her to try the product.

Besides these various reward programs, there are also a lot of different reward types, for example, gifts, vouchers, discounts, bonus credits (e.g., ‘free minutes’ for cell phones) and mail-in rebates. In each of these strategies, marketers invest money in attempts to increase the likelihood of people talking about their products. This raises two important questions. A first question that comes to mind is whether rewarding customers is beneficial in terms of recommendations; does providing a reward for a recommendation lead to an increase in referrals? Below, I will review research that provides an answer to

this question. A second question regards the response of the referral target to these rewarded recommendations. Is a recommendation that is stimulated with a reward still an effective and persuasive recommendation? Answering this question is one of the main goals of this dissertation.

### ***The Impact of Rewards on Referral Likelihood***

Based on previous research, one can conclude that rewards do increase the likelihood that people will talk about particular products. For example, Biyalogorsky, Gerstner and Libai (2001) modeled what an optimal reward program should look like. They argue that a company can use two different tools to encourage referrals: lowering the price of the product and offering a reward for referrals. Which of the two is most successful depends on the minimal price a customer wants to pay for a product and the level of delightedness after purchasing the product. They argue that, when a customer is easily delighted after purchasing the product (and they define delighted as achieving very high levels of satisfaction), this customer will recommend the product to other consumers, irrespective of an additional financial stimulus. However, in order to be delighted, customers have to purchase the product first. If the price of a product is higher than the price a consumer wants to pay for the product, s/he will not buy it and as a result also not be delighted. In these situations, lowering the price can be an effective strategy. When it is more difficult to really delight customers, a company can benefit from rewarding recommendations (until an optimal point is reached, beyond this point, the delightedness level is too low to be compensated with a reward strategy). This reward encourages the customer to talk about the product even though he or she is not really delighted.

Wirtz and Chew (2002) examined the impact of incentives, deal proneness, satisfaction with the product, and tie strength on recommendation likelihood, in an experimental setting. They showed that consumers -even when they are satisfied with the product- do not by definition talk about this product, and that an incentive positively impacts the recommendation likelihood. Furthermore, they demonstrated that people are more extreme in their communications

towards strong ties than towards weak ties (i.e., satisfied consumers are more positive and dissatisfied consumers more negative towards strong ties than towards weak ties). More recently, Ryu and Feick (2007) investigated the effects of referral reward programs among both weak and strong ties, and also examined the difference between a 'reward me' program and a 'reward both' program (i.e., only rewarding the referring customer versus rewarding the referring customer as well as the new customer). They found that offering a reward to the referring customer ('reward me') did increase referral likelihood, but only for weak ties and not for strong ties. Strong ties were already willing to recommend the product without the reward, and as a result did not increase any further in a response to the reward. The 'reward both' program caused an increase in referral likelihood for both strong and weak ties. Without any reward, the referral likelihood was higher for strong ties than for weak ties. This is in line with Godes and Mayzlin (2008), who argued that WOM marketing is most effective in driving sales when it occurs between acquaintances (or even strangers) instead of friends. They argue that strong ties either would already know about the product because people talk to their close friends anyhow, or are not interested. Weak ties have more effect in terms of spreading the information, and thereby increase the likelihood that the information reaches potentially interested customers.

The research described above provides an answer to the first question that is raised by rewarded recommendation campaigns. We conclude that, in general, referral programs have a positive impact on referral likelihood, and can thus be seen as effective. However, the previously described literature only focused on the question whether rewarding customers increases the likelihood that they will recommend the product. Answers to the second question, regarding the impact of these rewarded recommendations on the targets, remain lacking. How do rewarded recommendations differ from non-rewarded recommendations? How do these differences influence the effectiveness of the rewarded recommendations? How does the reward affect the way the recommending agent is evaluated and the target's willingness to try the product? And if rewarded recommendations are directed to other people then

non-rewarded recommendations, which characteristics of the relationship between agent and target then are important to take into account?

### ***How Rewarded Recommendations Differ***

In order to answer the questions raised above, it is important to obtain a clear idea of how rewarded recommendations exactly differ from non-rewarded recommendations. As discussed above, one of the most important characteristics of WOM is the absence of marketing influence (Bone, 1995), and closely related, the high degree of source credibility and trustworthiness of the recommending agent (Silverman, 2001; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). When a recommendation is rewarded by the company, these characteristics become (partly) undermined. Godes and Mayzlin (2008) characterize WOM marketing as “firm initiated but customer implemented”, and thereby also point out that these interactions contain both marketing and consumer aspects.

As both Bialogorsky and colleagues (2001), and Wirtz and Chew (2002) showed, rewards only increase referral likelihood for satisfied consumers. This indicates that the ‘genuine’ WOM motive is still important, but that the reward is an additional motive, which adds a marketing component to the interaction. Grayson (2007) argues that the lack of instrumental orientation (the marketing component) is very important for friendships, and that introducing monetary motives in these relationships is a potential source of conflict (see also Price & Arnould, 1999). Trying to avoid that the referral target would find out about the underlying reward violates ethical guidelines (see also <http://www.womma.org/ethics/code/read/> for the WOMMA ethics code) and has been classified as morally disputable (Creamer, 2005). Also from a more practical perspective, trying to avoid that the receiving customer knows that the recommendation was (partly) instigated by a desire for a reward instead of more genuine motives seems to be technically impossible. In the end, in order to be able to hand out the reward, it has to become clear that there was a recommendation from someone for the product. In addition, it is quite easy to find information about a referral program of a lot of products and companies (visiting a website can already be very informative in this respect). Moreover,

marketing communications about these campaigns can also reach recommendation targets, or rumors around these campaigns can arise. These factors increase the likelihood that the target of these recommendations gets to know about the referral program. Related to this point is the trustworthiness of the agent. Once there are multiple (financial) motives underlying a recommendation, this sheds doubts on the trustworthiness of the recommendation of this person. It becomes unclear to what extent the recommendation is driven by financial motives or by sincere product enthusiasm.

As mentioned earlier, rewarded recommendations are, in comparison to non-rewarded recommendations, relatively often directed towards weak tie sources (Ryu & Feick, 2007). This implies that the targets of a rewarded recommendation receive this recommendation from people with whom they have a different type of relationship than the people they receive non-rewarded recommendations from. This makes sense considering that in the case of strong ties, people are already more likely to talk about these products without a reward. Furthermore, as Ryu and Feick indicate, there is a social risk involved with recommendations in general, but this is even bigger with rewarded recommendations. If the referral target is unsatisfied with the product, this person might blame the referring agent, and this might happen to a larger extent when the recommendation is driven by a financial gain. If the relationship is less close (i.e., in the case of weak ties), referring agents are probably less concerned about the potential relationship costs of the financially stimulated recommendation (Grayson, 2007).

Knowing that rewards mainly lead to an increase in referrals directed to weak ties makes it relevant to examine how people react to recommendations from weak ties. Previous research examined differences between strong and weak ties (Brown & Reingen, 1987) and showed that people are relatively more likely to follow recommendations from strong than from weak ties. However, as yet it has not been examined whether different types of weak ties can differ in their degree of persuasiveness. One important difference that exists among various weak tie relationships is group membership; i.e., whether



someone belongs to your own group (the in-group) or to another group (the out-group). Imagine for example working for a big company. There are a lot of colleagues with whom you do not interact on a regular basis (or even never encounter), and they are thus clearly weak ties. But knowing that someone works for the same company as you do might cause a recommendation from this person to differ in effectiveness from a recommendation from someone who works for another company. In other words, even though the relationship with both of these people can only be classified as a weak tie relationship, the person who works for the same company belongs to the in-group whereas the person working for a different company belongs to the out-group.

There is ample research that shows the major impact of a simple categorization process of people into in-group and out-group on all sorts of behaviors (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000), but the differential effect of an in-group versus an out-group recommendation within a (weak tie) WOM setting, to our knowledge has not been investigated before. Furthermore, categorization is one of the first things people do when encountering and interacting with strangers (Tajfel, 1982; see also Levine & Moreland, 1998). This implies that group membership may be expected to influence the effectiveness of weak tie recommendations. Even though the distinction between strong and weak ties is probably not completely unrelated to the distinction between in-group and out-group members, the example described above makes clear that weak ties are not by definition out-group members. Another example that indicates that strong ties are not by definition in-group members is when a woman invites all her female friends over to her place for a high tea. Although she obviously has very strong ties with her husband, when she is drinking tea with her female friends, the husband does not belong to the in-group at that particular moment.

When a recommendation comes from someone who is perceived as belonging to 'your' group, this can trigger a different response than a recommendation from someone who does not belong to 'your' group (see Burger, Messian, Patel, del Prado and Anderson, 2004). People can for example perceive in-group members as more similar to them (even without knowing them well), or they can reject an out-group recommendation in order

to signal their unique identity (White and Dahl, 2005, 2007). To conclude, rewarded recommendations are directed relatively often towards weak ties, and in-group versus out-group categorizations are made fairly easily for weak ties as well as for strong ties, and can have a major impact on recommendation effectiveness.

### ***Focus of the Dissertation***

To summarize, previous research showed that rewarding customers for recommendations leads to an increase in recommendations. However, what remains lacking is insight into how the target of these rewarded recommendations responds to these recommendations; is the rewarded recommendation as persuasive and as effective as a non-rewarded recommendation? These rewarded recommendations seem to differ on important dimensions from non-rewarded recommendations; they are more often directed towards weak ties, and the reward potentially introduces ambiguity and uncertainty about the precise nature of the motives of the recommendation agent. This raises doubts about the trustworthiness and credibility of the agent, and this reward has important implications for the relationship between the referral target and the referral agent.

In the first place, the reward introduces a marketing aspect in a relationship that before was based purely on friendship norms<sup>1</sup>, and thereby creates a conflict between these different relationship norms (Grayson, 2007). One way to 'resolve' this relationship conflict is by framing the complete interaction as a sales interaction. When a sales related norm is also the most salient norm for the target of the rewarded recommendation, this should resolve the norm violating aspect of the reward. In the end, recommendations that are rewarded with a financial gain are common and accepted practice within sales interactions (see Fiske, 1992 for an overview of different relationship norms). However, this sales setting might introduce other aspects that are undesired in light of the rewarded recommendation. For example, rejecting a

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<sup>1</sup> Through this dissertation, with 'friendship' interaction, we mean the common WOM recommendations between weak ties, in which no reward is involved.

recommendation from someone with whom you interact based on sales norms, is probably easier than rejecting a recommendation from someone with whom you interact based more on friendship or equality norms. Besides investigating the impact of these norms on the evaluation of a recommendation agent and the product of the recommendation, this is also interesting in light of the existing research on relationship norms (e.g., McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; McGraw, Tetlock & Kristel, 2003). We aim to add to that literature by examining whether subtle cues that are not directly related to a target interaction, can already influence which relationship frame people use to judge and interpret an interaction. Furthermore, previous research on norm activations (e.g., Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Cialdini, 2003), so far mainly investigated the impact of subtly activated environmental norms on behaviors of the respondent, whereas we aim to examine the impact of relationship norms on interpersonal perceptions and evaluations. These topics will be studied in Chapter 2 and 3.

Second, the multiple motives that underlie rewarded recommendations shed doubts on the trustworthiness of the agent. This raises the question of how an initial perception of trustworthiness can influence the evaluations of these recommendations. Is it beneficial to have a very trustworthy first impression of the recommendation agent? Can this serve as some sort of a buffer against a negative (or untrustworthy) evaluation due to the presence of the reward as additional motive? In other words, do people give the benefit of the doubt with regard to the main underlying motive to trustworthy agents more than to untrustworthy agents? Or does it perhaps work the other way around? Is recommending something with a financial motive as additional stimulus evaluated less positively when there was a trustworthy first impression compared to when there was an untrustworthy first impression? After all, the behavior driven by a financial reward may come more as a (unappreciated) surprise from a trustworthy than from an untrustworthy agent. We study these topics in Chapter 3.

Third, although rewarded recommendations are relatively more often directed towards weak ties, it should be noted that not all weak tie relationships are equal. Therefore, it is interesting to obtain more insight into the impact of

differences that can exist between different weak tie relationships. Considering the basic tendency of people to categorize others as belonging to their in-group or out-group and the major impact that this categorization has on various factors related to interpersonal behavior, this seems to be an interesting variable to examine. There is research that has examined the relative persuasiveness of in-group and out-group members (e.g., Mackie, Worth & Asuncion, 1990), however, the exact underlying nature of previously found differences remains unclear. In order to obtain more insight into this process, we examine the reactions of people towards both positive and negative recommendations from in-group versus out-group members. In this way, we gain more insight into an important difference that exists between weak ties (group membership), and we extend the scope of this dissertation by incorporating the impact of negative WOM. These topics are studied in Chapter 4.

### ***Overview of the Dissertation***

In the first empirical chapter of this dissertation (Chapter 2), the fading boundaries between friendship and sales relationship norms within rewarded recommendation interactions, are the topic of investigation. Based on Fiske's (1992) model of social relationships, we argue that recommending a product when there is a reward as underlying motive, involves components of both equality matching and market pricing relationships. Equality matching relationships (EM) are relationships in which balance is important; individuals keep track of favors given and received, and try to balance this. These relationships are common among acquaintances, colleagues, and classmates (i.e., common weak tie interactions). Market pricing relationships (MP) are relationships in which people use a single value or utility metric, usually money, to make ratio comparisons of the costs and benefits of exchange relationship norms (e.g., salesperson – customer relationships). We hypothesize that, within EM, the rewarded recommendation is not appreciated and leads to less positive evaluations of the recommendation agent, than when norms related to market pricing apply to the interaction. However, we also

expect that, within EM, it is more difficult and less accepted to refuse an offer, which implies that people should be more likely to comply with this offer when EM norms are applicable norms than when MP norms are applicable norms. Furthermore, based on research on norm activation (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Aarts, Dijksterhuis, & Custers, 2003), we expect that these norms influence the perceptions of interaction partners in an efficient manner. We furthermore examine the impact of disclosing the underlying reward on the agent evaluations and compliance intentions, because the lack of disclosure is often raised as the main objection against rewarding recommendations (see Creamer, 2005). This makes it important to obtain insight into the precise impact of disclosing or not disclosing this reward. Does disclosure lead to more favorable evaluations or rather to less favorable evaluations, because disclosing this reward highlights the reward as additional motive?

In Chapter 3, we investigate the impact of source trustworthiness by manipulating facial cues of the source to give the source either a trustworthy or an untrustworthy appearance (DePaulo et al., 2003). As we argued above, the reward sheds doubts on the trustworthiness of the recommendation. Since one cannot fully rely on the trustworthiness of the recommendation, trustworthiness of the source becomes more important. We hypothesize that the impact of source trustworthiness critically depends on which of the relationship norms discussed above is salient during an interaction (equality matching versus market pricing; Fiske, 1992). We propose that rewarded recommendations are a sign of untrustworthy behavior, but only in relationships where people do not expect financial motives, i.e., equality matching interactions. When the source signals trustworthiness, we expect that people will react negatively when the actual behavior turns out to be untrustworthy. However, when the source signals untrustworthiness, people already expect untrustworthy behavior, and are thus less negative when the behavior does indeed turn out to be driven by financial motives. We do not expect to find this reversed effect of trustworthiness in relationships in which financial motives are accepted and expected (i.e., market pricing).

In Chapter 4, we examine how people react to recommendations from different types of weak tie sources. With this chapter, we also aim to contribute to the knowledge about non-rewarded and negative recommendations. By examining an important source variable on which various weak ties can differ from each other (i.e., group membership), we contribute to the general knowledge about WOM recommendations (since research on differences in weak tie sources is lacking). We examine the persuasiveness of recommendations from in-group members and out-group members. Previous research has shown that in-group members are in general more persuasive than out-group members (Van Knippenberg, 1999). In Chapter 4, we hypothesize that people are also inclined to differentiate their own attitudes away from the attitude of the out-group member. This implies that, when a stranger is categorized as belonging to another group, a recommendation from this person results in attitudes that reflect the opposite from the advocated position, and that recommendations can also lead to contrasting opinions. The aim is to show the effects of social categorization on the impact of recommendations.

Finally, in Chapter 5, the main findings and an overview of the limitations and the contributions of this dissertation are discussed.



## Chapter 2

### Relational Framing in Word-of-Mouth Marketing<sup>2</sup>

Buzz marketing has become an increasingly popular marketing tool. Within buzz marketing, the focus is on (financially) stimulating word-of-mouth referral (Rosen, 2000), by rewarding the referring customer. Previous research showed that financial rewards increase referral likelihood (Ryu & Feick, 2007), but that they also involve a social risk. Some authors indeed suggest that financial rewards introduce an ulterior motive for providing a referral, which may result in skepticism on the part of the receiving consumer (e.g., Godes et al., 2005; Godin, 2002 p. 95-96). In line with this, Shin (2006) discusses market research that found that a substantial percentage of consumers indicated that they would be unlikely to trust a recommendation again from a friend whom they later learned was compensated for making the suggestion.

In recent years, “buzz marketing” has become standard fare for marketers who are launching new brands and products. Its popularity led consumers’ advocacy groups to petition the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), which in response stressed the fact that referrals from “buzzing” customers should be accompanied by a proper disclosure. This practice is also endorsed by the Word-of-Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA), which suggested that the relationships between referring customers and marketers should be disclosed (see the WOMMA ethics code <http://www.womma.org/ethics/code/read/>). Other organizations, including Proctor and Gamble, take a less strict stance, and have suggested that disclosures are up to the buzzing consumer (see Creamer, 2005; Shin, 2006 for discussions).

By nature, buzz marketing is ambiguous: on the one hand, it is comparable with regular word-of-mouth, which is a friendly exchange of product or service

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Tuk, Verlegh, Smidts and Wigboldus (2008a)



related information among consumers. On the other hand, (financial) rewards for the referral introduce a clear ‘sales’ aspect into this interaction. There are important differences between “friendship” and “sales” relationships in terms of the behaviors that are normatively acceptable and appropriate (see Aggarwal, 2004; Fiske, 1992; Grayson, 2007; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; McGraw, Tetlock, & Kristel, 2003). Making one of these two relationships relatively more salient is therefore expected to lead to differences in the evaluation of the agent and the intention to comply with the referral. In the current research, we examine the underlying process by which relationship norms influence consumers’ perceptions of referrals and referring agents. We argue that relationship norms can impact consumers’ perceptions of their interaction partners, even when they are activated outside awareness and separate from the target interaction. Furthermore, we will examine the impact of disclosing or not disclosing this sales motive within friendship interactions, both in order to rule out a difference in disclosure as alternative explanation for the different effects of the relationship norms, and in order to gain more insight into the effects of financial rewards with and without a disclosure.

### ***Persuasion and Interpersonal Influence***

A large number of studies examines how, when and why certain persuasion strategies are effective or not. Both the more classical work, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model or the Heuristic-Systematic Model (for a review, see Petty & Wegener, 1998), and more recent work within the persuasion knowledge area (e.g., Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004; Brown & Krishna, 2004; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Kirmani & Campbell, 2004; Priester & Petty, 2003; Williams, Fitzsimons, & Block, 2004) looked at how characteristics of persuasion agent, message, and target influence the effectiveness of persuasion attempts. Less attention has been given to the role of the relationship between persuasion agent and target, and how differences in this relationship influence the effectiveness of the persuasion attempt. Word-of-mouth referrals are common among friends and acquaintances, but advice in return for a financial reward fits better with the norms applicable to sales

interactions (Fiske, 1992). Thus, in stimulated referrals, aspects of both a friendship and a sales relationship are combined into one interaction. The question that arises is how the norms that are related to these different relationships influence the evaluation of the persuasion attempt, both with regard to the evaluation of the agent and the tendency to comply with the referral.

### ***Types of Relationships***

As Folkes (2002, p. 1) pointed out: "...when situational cues lead people to perceive themselves as customers, they then interpret the world differently than when they do not perceive themselves as customers, and that influences their behavior." But what exactly makes the salesperson-customer relationship different and unique? Fiske's (1992) theory of social relationships is highly relevant to this question. Fiske argues that people in all cultures use four types of relational models to govern their social interaction, evaluation, and affect towards others. The first type is communal sharing (CS), in which there is a bounded group of people equivalent to each other, as within a family. The second type is authority ranking (AR), which entails an ordinal ranking of the social world. One's rank determines one's status and who has to obey who, as within military rankings. The third type is equality matching (EM), in which balance is important. Individuals keep track of favors given and received, and try to balance this. EM relations are common among acquaintances, colleagues, and classmates. The fourth relationship type is market pricing (MP), in which people use a single value or utility metric (usually money) to make ratio comparisons of the costs and benefits of exchanges. The use of financial compensation as exchange currency is a major difference between MP and the other relational types. Others (Heyman & Ariely, 2004) only differentiate between MP relationships ("monetary markets") and the other types of relationships ("social markets"). Heyman and Ariely showed that financial rewards immediately turn social market transactions into monetary market transactions, which influences the amount of effort people put into a task.

Usually, in an interaction, there is one dominant type, which governs the interaction (Fiske, 1992). Violations of the norms that are embedded in the relationship are not appreciated and can lead to conflict between the interaction partners. Research on how these relationships influence the perception of consumer behavior is limited, but there are parallels with work by Thaler (1985), and McGraw and colleagues (Aggarwal, 2004; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005; McGraw et al., 2003). This research examined how exchange behavior is influenced by social relationships. Thaler showed that consumers ask fairer (lower) selling prices when they sell goods to friends. McGraw and Tetlock (2005, Study 2) showed that both the willingness to pay and the willingness to accept, as well as the desire to maximize profit, was higher in MP relations than in EM, AR or CS relations (which did not differ significantly on any of these variables). Furthermore, McGraw and colleagues showed that people set higher selling prices for objects obtained through a CS, AR or EM relation, than for objects obtained through an MP relationship. This indicates that consumers value these objects more than MP obtained objects. McGraw and Tetlock (2005, Study 3) also showed that, within an EM relationship, an MP transaction is less acceptable than an EM transaction. To summarize, this literature shows that different relationship frames influence the price people will pay or accept, and the judgment of the appropriateness of a certain behavior.

### ***The Automatic Nature of Relationship Norms***

An important remaining issue regards the underlying process by which relationship norms influence our perceptions and judgments of the behaviors of our interaction partners. McGraw and Tetlock (2005) mainly manipulated relationship norms by explicitly mentioning the relationship. In response to these studies, Johar (2005) suggested that the results might have been caused by a difference in attributional thinking, because certain behaviors fit more within one relationship than within others. This in turn might have caused differences in degree of deliberation needed to make sense of the same

behaviors within different relationship types. Kahn (2005) also pointed at the artificial nature of the relationship norm salience in this research.

In the current studies, we examined whether relationship norms exert influence on a more automatic level, i.e., without conscious intent or awareness (Bargh, 1994). Research in social psychology provides support for such a process. Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003) for example, showed that people who are exposed to pictures of a library (where the norm is to be silent), tend to lower their voice in a subsequent task. Similarly, Aarts, Dijksterhuis and Custers (2003) demonstrated that activating a conformity norm (by priming respondents with words like comply, obey, and conform) causes people to behave more norm confirming. Furthermore, Cialdini (2007) showed that descriptive norms (information about what other people do in comparable situations) also influences our own behavior outside our awareness. Summarizing, these studies showed that exposure to environmental (or descriptive) norms has an impact on subsequent behaviors of the people exposed to these norms in an automatic manner.

We extended these findings from environmental norms to relational norms, and from a more intrapersonal level (norm influence on own behaviors) to an interpersonal level (norm influence on the perception of interaction partners) This is not as evident as it might seem. Previous research examined how norms activated by a situation or environment (such as a library), influence one's behaviors (see also Cialdini, 2003). We aimed to examine how perceptions and judgments of interaction partners are affected by norms related to interpersonal behaviors that are activated separately from an interpersonal interaction and outside the awareness of the respondent. With this, we aimed to show that not only environmental norms, but also relationship norms can be activated automatically. Moreover, these norms not only impact our own behaviors, but can also influence how we perceive and judge (the behaviors of) our interaction partners. Besides contributing to the relationship norm literature, this would also provide additional insights in the effectiveness of financially stimulated word-of-mouth referrals.

A potential problem that might arise from this way of looking at (unobtrusively) activated relationship norms is that any target interaction will almost inevitably activate relationship norms by itself (Fiske, 1992). While there might be ambiguity with regard to which relationship norm is most applicable to a specific interaction, there are hardly interactions in which no relationship norm whatsoever is used. Thus, attributional thoughts related to relationship norms can be aroused by an interaction, and potentially overrule the influence of any unobtrusively activated relationship norms (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). Previous research showed that impairing the cognitive capacity of respondents during the presentation of the target stimuli significantly reduced their ability to engage in attributional thoughts regarding these stimuli (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988). Thus, attributional thoughts are less likely to interfere with the unobtrusively primed relationship norms when participants have a reduced cognitive capacity while they are exposed to the target interaction (Bargh, 1999). We therefore expected the strongest effects of primed relationship norms on judgments of a target interaction when the capacity of the respondents is impaired, in line with the expected automatic nature of this process. Note in this respect that in the hassle of everyday life, reduced cognitive capacity is more the norm than the exception.

### ***Hypotheses***

In (financially) stimulated word-of-mouth referrals, both equality matching (the common relationship for referrals) and market pricing (introduced by the financial reward for the advice) are applicable relationship norms. When an MP relationship norm is activated, it is relatively more normal and accepted to ask or pay money for an object or service, or to advise products with the goal of earning money, than within an EM relationship (cf., McGraw & Tetlock, 2005). This leads people to judge a referral agent as more sincere when an MP relationship norm is activated than when an EM norm is activated. We expected this effect of relationship norms to occur on an automatic level (after unobtrusive activation), and to be stronger when the cognitive capacity of the agent is impaired while reading the scenario. Impaired cognitive capacity limits

the ability of the perceiver to infer relationship norms from the target scenario itself. As a result, he or she will rely relatively more on the norm that is activated unobtrusively.

In line with Campbell and Kirmani (2000), we specifically looked at the sincerity judgments of the agent. Anderson (1968) already indicated that sincerity and sincerity related judgments are the most important traits when judging others. Sincerity is a key trait in judging others, especially if there are multiple motives that might underlie their behavior (in this case both helping a friend and making money; (Fein, 1996; Marchand & Vonk, 2005). The presence of ulterior motives is predicted to primarily lead to lowered perceptions of sincerity (see also Darke & Ritchie, 2007).

*Hypothesis 1: When EM is unobtrusively activated as relationship frame, an interaction partner with underlying financial motives will be perceived as less sincere than when an MP frame is activated. This effect will be more pronounced when the cognitive capacity of the respondent is impaired than when the capacity is not impaired.*

With regard to the intention to comply with the referral, we expected a different pattern of results. Resistance is one of the central aspects of the customer-seller (i.e. MP) relationship (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004; Williams et al., 2004), and subsequently more appropriate and easily applied in customer-seller relationships in comparison to other types of relationships. We regularly say ‘no’ to offers from MP interaction partners (e.g., a salesperson), but not to offers from EM interaction partners: It is hard to refuse a friend’s request. Therefore, we expected higher compliance intentions with the referral when EM relationship norms are activated than when MP relationship norms are activated. Again, we expected the strongest effects when the capacity of the respondents is impaired.

*Hypothesis 2: When EM is unobtrusively activated as relationship frame, an interaction partner with underlying financial motives will lead to higher*

*compliance tendencies than when an MP frame is activated. This effect will be more profound when the cognitive capacity of the respondent is impaired than when the capacity is not impaired.*

### **Pilot Study**

We conducted a pilot study ( $N = 116$ ) to confirm that stimulated word-of-mouth referral is more appropriate within MP relationships than within EM relationships. Students read a scenario in which they had to imagine having lunch in the college cafeteria, and then being approached by Frank, someone who they do not know and who is either introduced as working for a magazine (MP), or as a fellow student (EM). Frank tells them enthusiastically about a magazine. In this scenario, Frank gives them a coupon for a trial subscription at a reduced rate. Later on, ‘you’ notice that Frank receives 10% of the subscription price for every new subscriber. We asked respondents to judge whether the behavior of Frank was inappropriate and unacceptable ( $\alpha = .87$ ; both 7-point scales, 1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree). Frank’s behavior was indeed judged as more inappropriate when he was a fellow student ( $M = 3.77$ ;  $SD = 1.48$ ) than when he worked for the magazine ( $M = 3.17$ ;  $SD = 1.40$ ),  $t(114) = 2.23$ ,  $p < .05$ .

These results confirm our expectation that a referral instigated by a financial reward is more appropriate within an MP relationship than within an EM relationship.

### **Study 1**

In Study 1, we aimed to show that the unobtrusive activation of a relationship frame (either MP or EM) has an influence on the perception and judgment of the behavior of the referral agent and on the intention to comply with his referral.

## **Method**

*Participants.* Participants were 103 students (26 male, 77 female) who participated for course credit or € 5.

*Procedure.* The experiment had a 2 (Relationship Norm Activation: Market Pricing versus Equality Matching) x 2 (Cognitive Capacity: Impaired versus Full) between subjects design.

Participants sat behind a computer screen, in individual cubicles. They were told that the experiment consisted of several unrelated parts. The first part (the relationship activation manipulation) was introduced as research on word recognition time. This was a word search paradigm adapted from van den Berg, Manstead, van der Pligt, and Wigboldus (2006). Participants were instructed to search for 15 hidden words in a 10 x 9 letter matrix. Next to five filler words, we used 10 words to manipulate relationship norms. In the MP relationship condition, these words were related to the marketplace (e.g., price, store, purchase). In the EM condition, these words were related to students (e.g., lecturer, desk, pencil). We used 'student words' because these would lead student participants to think of people with whom they have EM relationships in daily life (i.e. fellow students). A pretest ( $N = 112$ ) confirmed that these words were categorized as intended. We gave respondents the descriptions of both relationship types and asked them to classify the words to the extent that they fit with one of the relationship types (1 = definitely EM; 9 = definitely MP); The MP words were categorized as more MP ( $M = 7.44$ ;  $SD = 1.36$ ) than the EM words ( $M = 4.92$ ;  $SD = 1.20$ ),  $t(111) = 19.09$ ,  $p < .01$ .

After completing the word-search task, the 'second' task was introduced as a task on impression formation and contained the target scenario. Before reading the scenario, we manipulated the amount of available cognitive capacity. Respondents got the instruction to remember either eight (impaired capacity) or one digit (full capacity) until asked to report them (Krull, 1993).

While remembering these digits, they received the following scenario to read:



*“Imagine being allocated for an assignment for your major to Paul, a fellow student who you don’t know. For a meeting, he brought a new magazine with him, which is focussed on your major. An article from this magazine helps you with accomplishing the assignment. Paul is very enthusiastic about the journal. After your meeting, he gives you his copy, so that you can have a closer look at it. When you are at home, you notice the following coupon:”*

After participants pressed enter, a ‘member-get-member’ coupon appeared on the screen. This coupon stated the subscription rate, and that the current member would receive € 10 of gift vouchers for every new member; the latter part was already filled in by Paul with his name and subscriber’s number.

After reading the scenario, we measured the perceived sincerity of Paul with the following items; Paul is: “sincere”, “trustworthy”, and “reliable”. To examine whether the primary effect of different relationship norms is indeed on perceived sincerity and not on other personality judgments, we also measured liking with the items “Paul is nice” and “Paul is sympathetic”. Compliance intentions towards the offer were measured with the following items: “I consider becoming a subscriber to this journal”, “I am curious about the journal”, “I consider filling in the coupon” and “I am interested in the journal”. All items were measured on 7-point scales (1 = totally disagree, 7 = totally agree). After responding to these scales, participants were asked to write down the digits they were remembering. Subsequently, we asked participants whether they felt that they could pay less attention to the scenario due to the remembrance task (7-point scale, 1 = not at all, 7 = very much). We used a funneled debriefing questionnaire protocol (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000) to probe for suspicion regarding the goal of the study and the connection between the different parts. Participants were debriefed when finished.

## **Results**

*Manipulation checks.* We checked recall of the digits, and removed 10 participants from further analysis who did not remember four or more digits correctly (following Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). Participants in the full cognitive

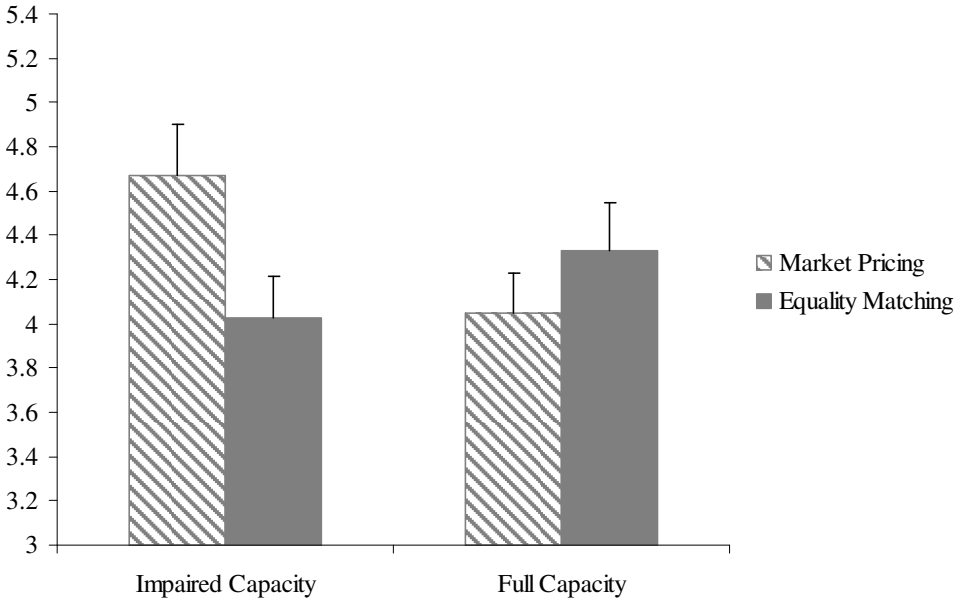
capacity condition felt that their attention was less impaired when reading the scenario ( $M = 1.75$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ) than participants in the impaired capacity condition ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ),  $t(91) = 6.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . The debriefing questionnaire showed no signs of suspicion.

*Dependent variables.* Evidence for the discriminant validity of our measures was obtained in a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA's). These CFA's showed a satisfactory fit for a three-factor model, in which the items are divided into "compliance" (four items), "sincerity" (three items), and "liking" (two items;  $\chi^2(24) = 85.46$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .86, GFI = .82). This model outperforms both a two-dimensional (in which liking and sincerity are combined;  $\chi^2(26) = 104.87$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .83, GFI = .78) and a one-dimensional model, in which all items are combined into one factor ( $\chi^2(27) = 236.21$ ,  $p < .05$ , CFI = .54, GFI = .63). A pseudo  $\chi^2$  test confirmed that the better fit of the three dimensional model is significant, both compared with the two-factor model ( $\Delta \chi^2(2) = 19.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and with the one-factor model ( $\Delta \chi^2(3) = 150.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further support for discriminant validity is provided by the fact that the average variance extracted for each construct (AVE liking = .68; AVE sincerity = .57; AVE compliance = .49) was always higher than the squared correlation between the focal construct and the two remaining constructs ( $\varphi^2$  liking-sincerity = .53;  $\varphi^2$  liking-compliance = .04;  $\varphi^2$  compliance-sincerity = .06).

An ANOVA showed a significant two-way interaction between relationship and cognitive capacity for perceived sincerity ( $\alpha = .75$ ),  $F(1,89) = 5.10$ ,  $p < .03$  (see Figure 2.1). When their cognitive capacity was impaired, participants judged the referring customer as more sincere when MP was activated ( $M = 4.67$ ;  $SD = 0.98$ ), than when EM was activated ( $M = 4.03$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ),  $F(1,89) = 4.05$ ,  $p < .05$ . This difference disappeared within the high available capacity condition,  $F(1,89) = 1.16$ ,  $p > .10$  (see Table 2.1 for means).

**Figure 2.1**

*Perceived Sincerity as Function of Relationship and Cognitive Capacity, Study 1*



**Table 2.1**

*Perceived Sincerity as Function of Relationship and Cognitive Capacity (Means and SD's; Study 1)*

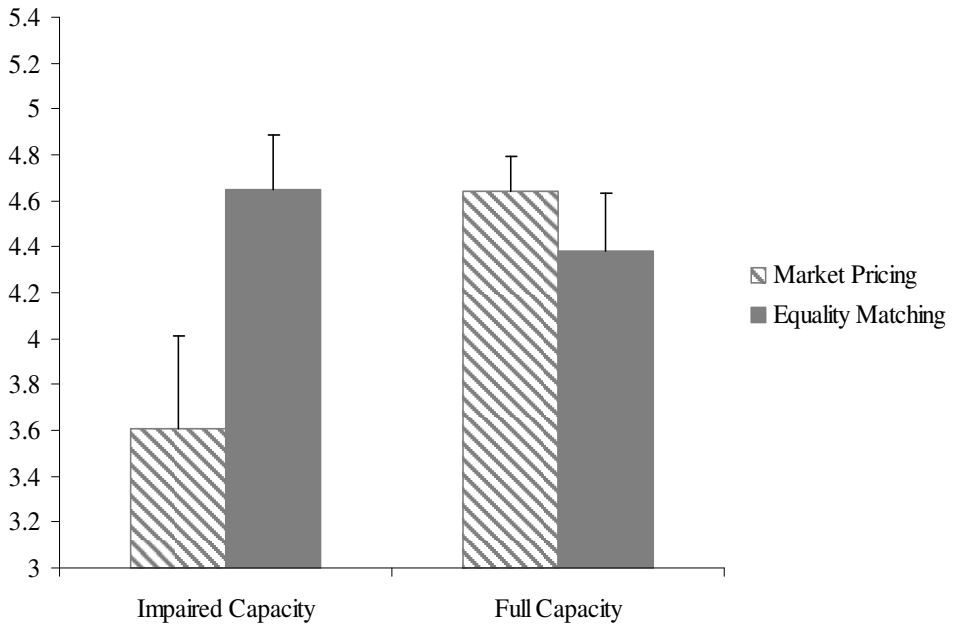
		Impaired capacity	Full capacity
MP activation	Mean	4.67 <sup>a</sup>	4.05 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	0.98	0.92
EM activation	Mean	4.03 <sup>b</sup>	4.33 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	0.85	1.10

*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p < .05$ ).

As expected, the compliance intention measure ( $\alpha = .84$ ) showed a significant two-way interaction,  $F(1,89) = 5.06, p < .03$  with a pattern of means that was different from the one observed for perceived sincerity (see Figure 2.2). Testing simple main effects revealed that the activated relationship norms again only influenced judgments under impaired capacity,  $F(1,89) = 6.48, p = .01$ . When the participants had full available cognitive capacity there were no significant differences,  $F < 1$  (see Table 2.2 for means). In line with Hypothesis 2, when capacity was impaired, compliance intention was lower when MP norms were activated ( $M = 3.61; SD = 1.72$ ) than when EM norms were activated ( $M = 4.65; SD = 1.12$ ). The liking judgment ( $\alpha = .78$ ) did not reveal any significant effects,  $F$ 's  $< 1$ .

**Figure 2.2**

*Compliance as Function of Relationship and Cognitive Capacity, Study 1*



**Table 2.2**

*Compliance as Function of Relationship and Cognitive Capacity (Means and SD's; Study 1)*

		Impaired capacity	Full capacity
MP activation	Mean	3.61 <sup>a</sup>	4.64 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	1.72	1.12
EM activation	Mean	4.65 <sup>b</sup>	4.38 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	1.12	1.31

*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p < .05$ ).

We examined the relationship between perceived sincerity and compliance. One could argue, for example, that a lower degree in perceived sincerity should also result in lower compliance intentions, and that the compliance intentions (after correcting for the impact of sincerity) should reflect even greater differences due to the norm activation. However, the bivariate correlation between compliance intentions and perceived sincerity was small and insignificant ( $r = .10, p = .34$ ). When we included sincerity as a covariate in the model with compliance as the dependent variable, then this covariate approached significance,  $F(1,88) = 3.26, p = .07$ . The interaction effect of relationship norm and cognitive capacity became somewhat stronger, but this change was not significant (Sobel test  $Z = 1.41, p > .10$ ). This indicated that the compliance effect was not obscured by perceived sincerity.

**Discussion**

The results of this study support our hypotheses. When an MP relationship norm was activated, participants perceived the referral agent as more sincere, but were less likely to comply with his offer. Interestingly, we only found these effects when the cognitive capacity of participants was impaired. This provides compelling evidence for our idea that relationship norms exert influence on perceptions and judgments of interaction partners in an efficient way. The differential impact of relationship norms on sincerity and on compliance intentions, might seem to be inconsistent with previous research findings

showing a positive effect of source credibility on persuasiveness (Petty & Wegener, 1998). However, it is in line with predictions based on relationship norms. Within every relationship norm, certain behaviors are appropriate/accepted, whereas others are not. Both recommending something in return for a reward, and rejecting this recommendation, are appropriate within an MP, but not within an EM relationship. Based on relationship theory (Fiske, 1992), it would be expected that people judge behaviors in light of a specific relationship norm. However, relationship theory does not predict a relationship between evaluations of different behaviors, which is in line with the current research findings.

We argued that, in the current context, norm violations will affect sincerity judgments, rather than liking judgments. In line with this reasoning, we found effects on the sincerity measure, but not on the liking scale. This goes against an alternative explanation, in which the effects are due to a difference in fluency between prime and behavior<sup>3</sup>. That is, advising something in order to gain a reward is more congruent with MP than with EM norms, which subsequently could have lead to more fluent processing. However, as Reber and colleagues (Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004; Reber, Winkielman, & Schwarz, 1998) indicate, an increase in processing fluency leads to an increase in liking in the first place, because processing fluency is an indication of progress towards successful recognition of the stimulus, which results in more (general) positive feelings (such as an increase in liking). If priming respondents with MP versus EM had caused a difference in congruency (and subsequently in processing fluency), we should have found differences on the general liking judgments, and not so much on a more specific judgment, such as sincerity. The current results are therefore more in line with the hypothesized norm violation account, which predicts differences in sincerity judgments and not necessarily in liking judgments. Another alternative explanation<sup>4</sup> of our results is that, within an MP frame, selling behavior is more expected, so that the MP context itself serves as a disclosure of the underlying

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<sup>3,4</sup> We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for these valuable suggestions.

(selling) motive for the referral. In that case it is not the selling itself that is inappropriate within EM norms, but the unexpectedness of the selling behavior, i.e., the lack of disclosure of the underlying (selling) motive. In Study 2, we examined the impact of disclosing the reward within an EM relationship frame. If a lack of disclosure forms the underlying explanation for our effects, we should find an effect of disclosure versus no disclosure that is comparable to the effect of MP versus EM in the first study.

## **Study 2**

Disclosing or not disclosing (financial) incentives has been a topic of debate within buzz marketing (Creamer, 2005; Shin, 2006) and one could question whether and how disclosing or not disclosing the financial reward influences the perceptions of these recommendations. On the one hand, by disclosing this motive it becomes clear that the referring customer is indeed (partly) motivated by a financial gain, which might result in less positive agent evaluations. The disclosure might highlight that the referring agent is motivated by money, which is not the appreciated within EM relationships and could result in lower sincerity judgments. On the other hand, disclosing can also have a positive effect on agent evaluations. When the agent does not disclose the reward, there is uncertainty and unclearness about the real motives. Disclosure thus might lead to the perception that the agent at least is honest and open about the motives for the referral (Forehand & Grier, 2003). People may appreciate this and as a result evaluate an agent who discloses as more sincere than an agent who does not disclose. Within a setting in which the financial motive will become apparent sooner or later (which is likely within rewarded recommendations), we expect that disclosing leads to more sincere evaluations than not disclosing. In line with Johar and Simmons (2000), we expect the impact of disclosures on evaluations to be bigger when respondents have full cognitive capacity available. Since respondents are able to engage in more extensive processing of the scenario when their capacity is not impaired, they

will be able to reflect on the (lack of) disclosure, and adjust their judgment accordingly.

Finding these results in Study 2 would also rule out the alternative explanation that it is not so much a difference in norm violation, but a difference in disclosure that explains the results of Study 1. After all, Study 1 showed that the impact of relationship norms is stronger under low capacity than under high capacity.

*Hypothesis 3: Within an EM relationship norm, disclosing a sales motive will lead to more sincere judgments of interaction partners than not disclosing this motive, but only when the capacity of the respondents is not impaired.*

### **Method**

*Participants.* 147 students (70 male and 77 female) participated in this study in exchange for a small gift or course credit.

*Procedure.* The experiment had a 2 (Disclosure: Disclosure versus No Disclosure) x 2 (Cognitive Capacity: Impaired versus Not Impaired) between subjects design. The procedure of this study resembled the procedure of Study 1 to a large extent. We primed all respondents with an EM frame, similar to the one used in Study 1. The disclosure was manipulated by adding (or not) a disclosure statement to the original scenario (see below, disclosure in brackets):

*“Imagine being allocated for an assignment for your major to Paul, a fellow student who you don’t know. For a meeting, he brought a new magazine with him, which is focussed on your major. An article from this magazine helps you with accomplishing the assignment. Paul is very enthusiastic about the journal. After your meeting, he gives you his copy, so that you can have a closer look at it. (He tells you that he will receive 10 Euros when you subscribe to the magazine.) When you are at home, you notice the following coupon:”*



The dependent measures (sincerity, liking and compliance) were equal to Study 1. As manipulation checks, we asked respondents whether they noticed that Paul received a financial reward for a new customer, and whether Paul had told them about the reward.

### **Results**

*Manipulation checks.* We removed 28 respondents who failed to notice that Paul would receive money for a new subscriber or who incorrectly answered the disclosure manipulation check (i.e., did not notice that Paul revealed that he would receive money in the disclosure condition or the opposite in the no disclosure condition)<sup>5</sup>.

*Dependent variables.* There was a significant main effect of disclosure on sincerity,  $F(1,115) = 13.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Paul was judged more sincere in the condition with disclosure ( $M = 4.72$ ;  $SD = 1.02$ ) than without disclosure ( $M = 3.95$ ;  $SD = 1.02$ ). This main effect was qualified by a significant interaction effect between the capacity manipulation and the disclosure manipulation,  $F(1,115) = 4.25$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Table 2.3). With full cognitive capacity available, respondents judged Paul as more sincere in the disclosure condition ( $M = 4.83$ ;  $SD = 0.94$ ) than in the no disclosure condition ( $M = 3.73$ ;  $SD = 1.01$ ),  $F(1, 115) = 20.93$ ,  $p < .001$ . When capacity was impaired, there was no difference between disclosure and no disclosure,  $F(1,115) = 1.00$ ,  $ns$  (see Figure 2.3). In line with Study 1, the difference between full and impaired cognitive capacity in the no disclosure condition, was not significant.

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<sup>5</sup> We are of the fact that this is a relatively large number. In line with our reasoning (and see also Johar and Simmons, 2000) that incorporating a disclosure in a judgment would require cognitive effort, most (23) of these respondents were in the impaired capacity condition. However, we think that it is of crucial importance for properly testing our hypothesis that the respondents have a correct recall of the disclosure. If we do look at the complete sample, the focal interaction effect for sincerity remains significant,  $F(1,88) = 5.43$ ,  $p = .02$ , and the associated pattern of means is the same as the one reported above.

**Table 2.3**

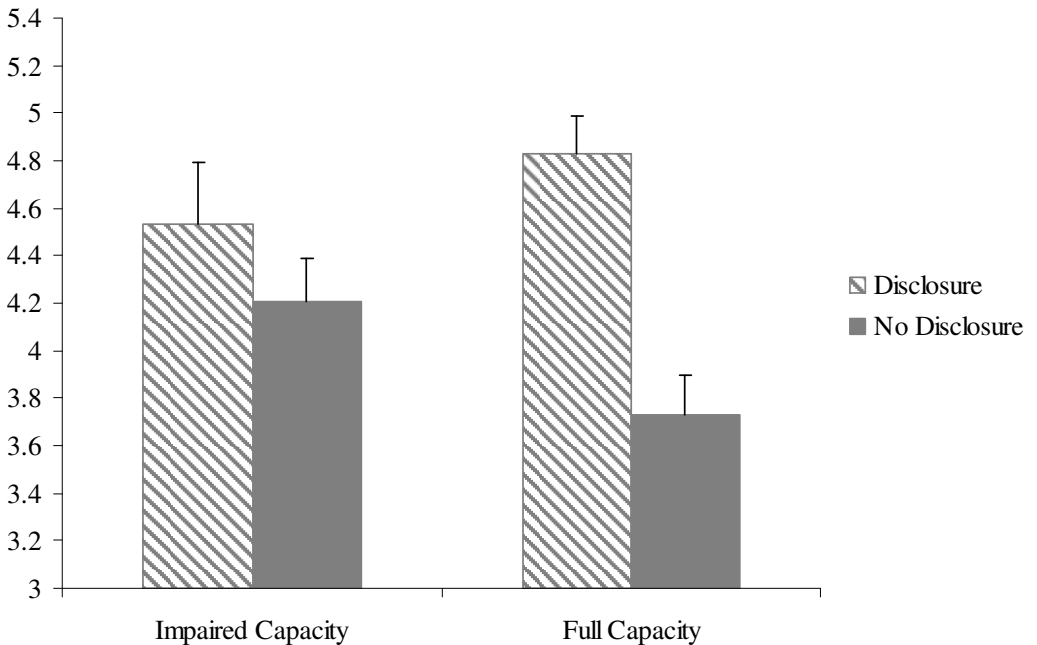
*Perceived Sincerity as Function of Disclosure and Cognitive Capacity (Means and SD's; Study 2)*

		Impaired capacity	Full capacity
Disclosure	Mean	4.53 <sup>a</sup>	4.83 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	1.16	0.94
No disclosure	Mean	4.21 <sup>a,b</sup>	3.73 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	0.98	1.01

Note. Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p < .05$ ).

**Figure 2.3**

*Perceived Sincerity as Function of Disclosure and Cognitive Capacity, Study 2*



There were no significant main or interaction effects of capacity and disclosure on compliance intentions, neither on liking judgments, all  $p$ 's  $> .15$ . This is not unexpected and indicates that the agent, and not (the supplier of) the product, is fully responsible for disclosing or not disclosing these kinds of motives, and that this disclosure does not influence compliance intentions.

### ***Discussion***

The results of Study 2 provide insight into the impact of disclosing or not disclosing a financial reward within financially stimulated word-of-mouth recommendations. They show the positive but limited effects of disclosure; the disclosure only had an impact on respondents with ample cognitive capacity. Only under these conditions, a disclosure led to more sincere judgments than no disclosure. This indicates that disclosing a financial motive is appreciated by consumers, but that cognitive effort is required to process such disclosures.

Furthermore, the current results also confirm that the differences found between MP and EM within the low capacity condition in Study 1 are not driven by a difference in disclosure of the selling motive. After all, the disclosure of the sales role by the agent did not lead to significant differences in perceived sincerity within the EM frame when the respondent (who is the target of the referral) did not have a lot of cognitive capacity available. This demonstrates that a disclosure effect is different from the influence of activating MP norms, ruling out disclosure as a potential cause of the effects of Study 1.

## **General Discussion**

Our hypotheses were confirmed in a set of three studies. A pilot study confirmed that a financially stimulated word-of-mouth referral is judged as more appropriate when it is framed as an MP interaction than when framed as an EM interaction. This supports the claim that rewarded referrals fit better with MP relationship norms than with EM relationship norms. In the first

study, we examined the automatic and efficient nature of these relationship norms and their impact on the perceptions and judgments of our interaction partners and the intention to comply with their recommendations. In the second study, we examined the impact of disclosing or not disclosing the financial motives on these evaluations. We showed that activation of different relationship norms led to evaluating the interaction partner in line with these norms, resulting in higher sincerity judgments and lower compliance intentions when an MP norm was activated (in which both selling and rejecting sales offers are common practice) than when an EM norm was activated. The second study showed that disclosing the motive led to more favorable evaluations of the interaction partner, but only when the respondent had full cognitive capacity available.

### ***Relationship Norms***

These studies contribute to the literature on norms, on relationship frames, and on word-of-mouth referrals. First, we extend the literature on the automatic impact of environmental norms on behaviors to the impact of relationship norms on interpersonal interactions, perceptions and judgments. Where previous research mainly focused on the impact of activated situational norms on how people behave themselves, we showed the impact of relationship norms on the judgment and evaluation of our interaction partners.

Second, the finding that subtle cues can activate different relationship frames contributes to the literature on relationship norms. We showed that norms regarding the behaviors that are legitimate within a specific relationship influence our perceptions of (seemingly unrelated) interactions and the way we judge our interaction partners after an unobtrusive activation procedure. This shows that we are able to manipulate the type of relationship norm that governs a certain interaction. Note that we have limited our research to ambiguous situations, where it is not immediately obvious which relationship norm is most applicable to the situation. If a situation evokes an obvious and strong relationship norm, subtle cues are not likely to impact judgments of interaction partners. However, there are plenty of situations in daily life in which the

relationship is not immediately apparent. For example, when you are inside a clothing store and someone says that a sweater looks good on you, your first inference is probably “salesperson” (MP). If you see, however, that the person wears a coat, you may conclude that he or she is also a customer who just walked into the store, which activates a different set of norms and leads to a different response.

By activating relationship norms in an unobtrusive way and finding effects under conditions of impaired cognitive capacity, we can rule out alternative explanations that have been raised for previous studies on relationship norms (Johar, 2005; Kahn, 2005). For example, Kahn argued that manipulating relationships within a scenario might lead to an artificial increase in motivation to make decisions that are most easily justifiable towards others. Since, we did not manipulate the relationships within the scenario, this explanation does not seem to be applicable to our results. However, we do still find strong differences in evaluations due to the activated relationship norms. Finding the strongest effects of the activated norms under conditions of limited cognitive capacity is not a limitation of the current studies. In daily life, consumers almost never pay full attention to their interactions, which makes it very plausible that relationship norms that are activated by subtle (environmental) cues influence our perceptions of our interaction partners. In fact, our impaired cognitive capacity condition may be closer to real life (consumer related) situations and decisions than the high capacity condition (cf. Dijksterhuis, Smith, van Baaren, & Wigboldus, 2005).

Third, we also contribute to the literature on financially stimulated word-of-mouth referrals. Ryu and Feick (2007) showed that stimulating referrals with financial rewards leads to higher referral likelihood, but they were silent about the effects of stimulating referrals on the receiving consumers. Our research demonstrates that the effectiveness of referrals can be influenced by manipulating the relationship norm that is applied to the interaction. Compared to MP norms, the activation of EM norms led to an increase in “sales” (i.e., the tendency to comply with the referral), and a decrease in perceived sincerity of the referring customer. This implies that there might be a difference between

the long term and the short term effectiveness of word-of-mouth marketing. On the short term, framing referrals as part of an EM relationship increases compliance. This does, however, lead to lower levels of perceived sincerity, which might have negative effects on compliance intentions in the long run. From a long run perspective, introducing MP norms in these interactions might be more recommendable. Furthermore, the results of our second study show that disclosing these sales motives can have positive effects on the evaluations of the agent, but only when targets have ample cognitive capacity available.

These results are remarkable, considering the general assumption that referral campaigns are effective because of the absence of marketing interests (cf. Creamer, 2005; Silverman, 2001). We do not want to refute that statement, but aim to show the boundaries of this common belief. Referral campaigns are quite commonly instigated by rewards (i.e., money, a present, or some sort of discount, cf. Godin, 2002; Ryu & Feick, 2007), and the target of the referral campaign can become aware of these ulterior motives. In fact, Creamer (2005) notes that it might even be legally required to disclose the financial reward. Objections to requiring a disclosure from a company point of view do not seem to hold in light of our research findings. On the contrary, in these situations in which it is likely that the target of the referral will find out about the financial motives sooner or later (which is the case for many of these campaigns), disclosing can lead to more positive agent evaluations than not disclosing. At the same time, a disclosure did not harm the compliance intentions. Our results demonstrate that introducing sales related aspects in the interaction in which a financially stimulated word-of-mouth recommendation occurs can have positive instead of negative effects on evaluations of the referring agent. Introducing these sales related aspects can either be in a blatant way by disclosing these financial rewards or in a more subtle way by making market pricing norms the most salient relationship norms during this interaction. This is in line with previous research on persuasion knowledge, which shows that, once persuasion knowledge is activated people are better able to cope with persuasion attempts than before it was activated.

Our research differs in important aspects from the persuasion knowledge literature that focused on agent evaluations (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Campbell & Kirmani, forthcoming; Main, Dahl, & Darke, 2007). This previous research showed that flattery within a sales context more easily leads to inference of ulterior motives, which results in less favorable (or sincere) agent evaluations. We did not look at flattery or the inference of ulterior motives, but examined the influence of different relationship norms on how people evaluate behavior that is driven by an ulterior motive. Furthermore, we examined the impact of the relationship norms within a word-of-mouth setting, and one of the important factors that differentiates a word-of-mouth context from common sales contexts, is the relationship between the agent and the target.

The current research focused on the difference between MP and EM frames, because these two frames seem most relevant in the context of word-of-mouth marketing: referrals usually occur within EM relationships, while financial rewards for referrals introduce an MP component. However, it may be worthwhile to examine also the roles of communal sharing (CS) and authority ranking (AR) relationship types (Fiske, 1992) in a persuasion context. CS frames could for example apply to word of mouth among close friends or family, while AR frames could be relevant in the workplace, or situations such as doctors advising patients or teachers advising students. Within CS relationships, both moral considerations (i.e., “selling” something to someone with whom you have a CS relationship is in general very norm violating) and the tendency to comply might be augmented in comparison to EM relations. With regard to AR relations, a (financially stimulated) referral from an authority (for example your doctor or your boss) might increase compliance because of the tendency to obey authorities, whereas sincerity might be less crucial in these relationships than in EM relationships.

An interesting angle for future research might be to look at the type of reward provided by the firm, and in this way, looking at the differential relationship types possible between the company and the referring agent (Heyman & Ariely, 2004). By providing a financial reward, this relationship is typical MP (or a ‘monetary market’; Heyman & Ariely), whereas, for example,

providing a small gift or a free sample might be more in line with EM (or a ‘social market’) and subsequently exert a differential impact on the way this agent is perceived by the target, and the compliance intention.

To conclude, we demonstrated that the activation of different relationship norms can facilitate or hinder persuasion, and influences persuasion agent evaluations, depending on the match between the relationship and the behavior. Our findings thereby contribute to our understanding of consumers’ responses to persuasion attempts, and the processes underlying these responses.





## Chapter 3

### Facial Trustworthiness in Word-of-Mouth Marketing<sup>6</sup>

Faces are often very important when interacting with others. Not only do they express temporary states, faces are also often used to infer more stable traits. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in face perception (cf., Bodenhausen & Macrae, 2006). However, most research on faces and person perception occurred within a social vacuum, without any reference to the interpersonal relationship between the observers (i.e., participants) and the person being judged. We argue that within different social contexts, the same facial cues can have a totally different influence. For example, baby-facedness makes it less likely that one will win political elections (Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005), but at the same time enhances the likelihood that one will get a job as a nurse (Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2005). The current research examines how the social relationship between the observer and the observee moderates the impact of facial cues on person judgments.

One of the first characteristics that we infer when encountering an unfamiliar face is trustworthiness. Willis and Todorov (2006) showed that people are very fast in forming trustworthiness impressions based on facial characteristics (within 100 ms), and that an increase in time span to make these judgments did not further increase the quality of these judgments. Out of several time-constrained trait inferences, 100 ms trustworthiness impressions showed the highest correlations with impressions formed after unlimited exposure time. People thus are very efficient in making trustworthiness inferences from faces.

Importantly, facial characteristics may serve as cues that influence the extent to which people value behavioral information (Brownlow, 1992).

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<sup>6</sup> Based on Tuk, Verlegh, Smidts and Wigboldus (2008b)

Brownlow provided participants with information that suggested the source to be either relatively trustworthy or untrustworthy and (independently) either an expert or an inexpert. Subsequently she examined the degree of persuasiveness of the source. Importantly, the source had either a baby face or a mature face. The results demonstrated that a differential degree of trustworthiness did not influence the persuasiveness of the source when this source had a baby face, whereas the expertise did. The reverse was the case when the source had a mature face; trustworthiness but not expertise influenced the degree of persuasiveness of this source. Presumably, a baby faced person is a trustworthy source anyhow (see also Todorov et al., 2005; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2005); and a mature face is able to communicate knowledgeable ability, even when expertise might be questioned. Facial characteristics of sources thus direct our attention towards different aspects of an interaction, or make us value the same information in a different way.

Hassin and Trope (2000) distinguish two types of processes underlying person judgments from face perceptions. The first process is labeled “reading from faces” (RFF). Hassin and Trope showed that people use facial characteristics when they form an impression of a person’s behavior. This occurred only when the description about the behavior was ambiguous, not when this description was unambiguous. The second process is labeled “reading into faces” (RIF). Respondents, who were provided with information about two people and were asked to rate the accompanying faces on a variety of dimensions, rated these faces as more similar when the descriptions of these persons closely matched each other than when these descriptions differed from each other, even though these were exactly the same faces. In line with this, Claypool, Hugenberg, Housley and Mackie (2007) showed that familiarity of the faces had an impact on the perception of these faces. In sum, faces influence the perception of behavior and behavioral information influences the perception of faces. In the current research, we focus on an RFF type of process. We propose that the interpersonal relationship between the observer and the observed constitutes an important social context variable that moderates the influence of facial impressions on person judgments. More

specifically, we examine how interpersonal relationships influence the interplay between characteristics inferred from a person's face and the behavior of this person. For example, trustworthiness inferences based on facial characteristics probably play a different role when blind-dating a person than when buying pre-packed ice-cream from the same person.

### ***Relationships and Facial Cues***

Judgments of the behaviors of others are strongly influenced by the relationships that we have with them. Although there are several theories that distinguish and categorize different relationship types, Fiske's (1992) model of relationship frames provides a framework that appears to be especially relevant when studying the trustworthiness of others. Fiske distinguished between four different types of relationships, and argued that these four types (or mixtures thereof) capture the entire spectrum of relationships among people. These four different types are communal sharing (CS; relationships with very close others), authority ranking (AR; relationships based on superior-subordinate relations), equality matching (EM; relationships based on equality and an equal exchange of favors), and market pricing (MP; relationships in which money is the underlying communality to exchange products, services and favors and money is used to communicate the value of things). Very simple cues are able to communicate which relational frame is relevant for a specific interaction. For example, when you enter a shop, you know that you will interact with a salesperson, and this interaction is likely to be governed by an MP relationship. When a student enters a classroom, she knows that the people in the room are fellow students (EM relations), except for the person in front of the room, facing the other people. This is the professor, with whom she has an AR relationship.

With respect to the role of relationships in trustworthiness judgments, Fiske (1992, p. 702) pointed out a key distinction between EM and MP relationships. EM exchanges involve trust and the implicit obligation to reciprocate, which is in contrast with the explicit contractual nature of economic exchange in MP relations. To illustrate, consider the following: When you buy a sweater from a

salesclerk in a store (MP relationship), you can see and feel what you are buying, and you know the exact conditions of the exchange because you see the price on the tag. If you are unsatisfied, you can return it and get your money back. Compare this to a case where you are borrowing a sweater from an acquaintance (EM relationship): The other person trusts you with her sweater. If there is a small stain or a tear, it may be difficult to decide on the proper way to compensate the other. Furthermore, in contrast to buying a sweater where the exchange occurs simultaneously (you pay the price and get the sweater), borrowing a sweater means that the other person may ask for a comparable favor, but you don't know what will be asked or when it will be asked. Such a request for reciprocating the favor might not come at a convenient moment, or be of a different nature than you had in mind yourself (Cialdini, 2001). This lack of explicit regulations of exchange within EM results in a greater reliance on interpersonal trust.

In line with Fiske's notions, we argue that interpersonal trust plays a more important role within EM relations than within MP related interactions. In the current research, we aim to examine whether the impact of trustworthiness inferences based on facial cues differs between EM and MP relationships.

To study these issues, we focused on the exchange of product recommendations among consumers, which is referred to as "word of mouth". People's product evaluations are strongly influenced by word of mouth they receive (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991). It goes without saying that the business world is very interested in strategies that can be used to stimulate word-of-mouth recommendations, such as providing a financial reward for making a recommendation (cf., Ryu & Feick, 2007). Such strategies create social interactions that contain components of both equality matching and market pricing relationships. That is, the recommendations are common within EM relations, but the presence of a financial reward introduces a clear MP component. Financially stimulated word of mouth thus provides an excellent context for the study of EM versus MP relationships in social interactions. Moreover, these kinds of recommendations provide an excellent background for studying trustworthiness because it is unclear whether these

recommendations are based on true enthusiasm towards a product, or on the desire for financial gain. Ambiguity about the trustworthiness of the recommendation makes it more likely that people use facial cues in their final evaluations (see Hassin & Trope, 2000). Facial trustworthiness cues appear to be especially relevant in this respect, because the ambiguity of financially motivated behavior causes people to have some level of suspicion and distrust (Main, Dahl, & Darke, 2007).

Based on our earlier theorizing, we propose that these facial cues differentially influence our evaluations of such an agent in either an EM or an MP relationship. Since trust is more important in EM relationships than in MP relationships, facial cues for trustworthiness should have a stronger impact on the evaluations of agents within an EM relationship than within an MP relationship (Fiske, 1992). We predicted that word of mouth that is motivated by financial gain (untrustworthy behavior) is less expected from a person with a trustworthy face than from a person with an untrustworthy face. As a result, overall evaluations of the person with a trustworthy face will be less positive than evaluations of the person with a less trustworthy face. This effect is expected to be moderated by relationship context, and occur only in relationship contexts in which (interpersonal) trustworthiness is important (EM relationships). When the relationship context is one in which trust is less important (as is the case within MP relationships), there should be less of a difference between evaluations of agents with trustworthy faces and agents with untrustworthy faces.

We conduct two studies in which we test these expectations. In both studies, we manipulate facial trustworthiness and the relationship context in which the same interaction occurs. This interaction is a rewarded word-of-mouth recommendation. We use different methods to manipulate the relationship context. In the first study, we manipulate the relationship context explicitly and as part of the target interaction, in order to examine whether the expected effect really occurs. In the second study, we will use a more unobtrusive manipulation, and activate either an EM or an MP relationship context separate from a target scenario. By doing so, we aim to gain more

insights in the exact nature of the effect, because this would show that context variables that are not part of a target interaction, can already influence the final evaluations of a person with certain face characteristics in interaction with a particular behavior.

## Study 1

### *Method*

*Participants.* One hundred and ten students (62 male and 48 female, mean age  $M = 22.40$  years old) participated in exchange for a small gift.

*Procedure.* Participants sat behind computer screens, in individual cubicles. Relationship context (EM versus MP) and trust (Trustworthy versus Untrustworthy) were manipulated between subjects. Facial trustworthiness was manipulated by systematic variations of the shape of the eyes (round or narrow; Schul, Mayo, & Burnstein, 2004) and mouth (regular or a little narrower, in order to give the impression that the lips are pressed together; DePaulo et al. 2003). We used the program FACES 4.0 to construct several pairs of faces that differed only in terms of eye shape, and lip shape. We pretested these faces ( $N=26$ ) and carefully selected the pair (see Figure 3.1) that only differed significantly in degree of trustworthiness,  $t(25) = 2.72$ ,  $p = .01$ ; the trustworthy face scored higher ( $M = 5.79$ ;  $SD = 1.76$ ) than the untrustworthy face ( $M = 3.92$ ;  $SD = 1.80$ ; measured on a 9-point scale), but not in terms of likeability, attractiveness, intelligence and realism.

**Figure 3.1**

*Untrustworthy and Trustworthy Face*



Untrustworthy Face



Trustworthy Face

To make sure that respondents really saw the faces and not just paid attention to the target scenario, the face (either the trustworthy or the untrustworthy one, randomly determined) first appeared on the left side of the screen, and after one second the following scenario appeared on the right side of the screen:

*This is Paul. Paul is a student [EM]/ who works for the promotion team of a new magazine [MP]. Imagine that you are having lunch in the college cafeteria. It is crowded and Paul asks whether he can share the table with you. Paul introduces himself and starts a conversation with you. He tells you about [EM]/ that he works for [MP] a new magazine, which is targeted at students. Paul is very enthusiastic about this magazine and tells you that it*



*contains a lot of interesting interviews and can help you find traineeships and a job. Paul gives you a coupon for a trial subscription at reduced rate and leaves the table.*

*When you read the coupon, you find out that Paul will receive 10% of the subscription price, when you subscribe.*

The bold sentences contain the manipulation of relationships. As Fiske (1992, p. 703) indicates, EM relationships “do not presuppose the prior existence of a group: EM is itself a common blueprint for connecting people”. Since all respondents were students, and Paul was also a student, EM is the default type of relationship applicable to interactions like the above described.

After reading the scenario, we asked respondents to evaluate Paul. We were mainly interested in a general evaluation of Paul, and therefore included the following scales: Paul is “sympathetic”; “friendly”; “credible”; “egoistic”; “annoying”; “irritating” and “pushy” (1 = totally disagree; 7 = totally agree, negative items were reverse coded). After these dependent measures, we asked respondents whether they had the impression that Paul would receive money if they would subscribe to the magazine (‘yes’, ‘no’, or ‘don’t remember’), to check whether respondents indeed noticed the presence of the ulterior motive. Respondents then left the cubicle to receive a debriefing and their reward.

### **Results**

We excluded all respondents who did not indicate that Paul would receive money if they would subscribe, because this indicates that they missed the crucial information that would lead one to question the motives and trustworthiness of Paul. These were 38 respondents, leaving 72 participants<sup>7</sup>. Of these 38 respondents, there were relatively more respondents from the EM condition (26), than from the MP condition (12)  $\chi^2(1) = 8.50, p = .01$ ,

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<sup>7</sup> We are aware of the fact that this is a large number of respondents to exclude. However, because the awareness of the financial motive (the ambiguous and potentially untrustworthy part of the behavior) is of crucial importance for testing our hypothesis, we can only draw reliable conclusions for respondents who did indeed notice the ulterior motive. If we do not apply this criterion, the results are in the same direction.

confirming the idea that the financial motive was less expected (and thus less noticed) within EM than within MP. There was no difference in number of respondents noticing the financial motive between the trustworthy (20 respondents) and the untrustworthy (18 respondents) faces.

The evaluations of the agent were averaged into an ‘agent impression’ index ( $\alpha = .82$ ). An ANOVA with relationship frame and trust as independent variables revealed a main effect of relationship frame,  $F(1,68) = 5.66, p < .05$ . Respondents were more positive about Paul when MP was the most salient relationship norm in the interaction ( $M = 4.43; SD = 0.79$ ) compared to when EM was the most salient norm ( $M = 3.96; SD = 1.08$ ; see Table 3.1 for means and SD’s). This is in line with our reasoning that the financial motive is less offending within the MP relationship frame than within the EM frame. More importantly, there was also a significant interaction effect between trust and relationship frame on general agent judgment,  $F(1,68) = 4.95, p < .03$ . In the MP frame, there was no difference in agent impressions between the trustworthy and the untrustworthy face,  $F < 1$  (see Figure 3.2). In the EM frame, the agent with the untrustworthy face was evaluated as more favorable ( $M = 4.33, SD = 0.99$ ) than the agent with the trustworthy face ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.04$ ),  $F(1,68) = 5.46, p < .05$ .

**Table 3.1**

*Agent Judgments as a Function of Relationship Frame and Face Trustworthiness, Study 1 (Means and SD’s)*

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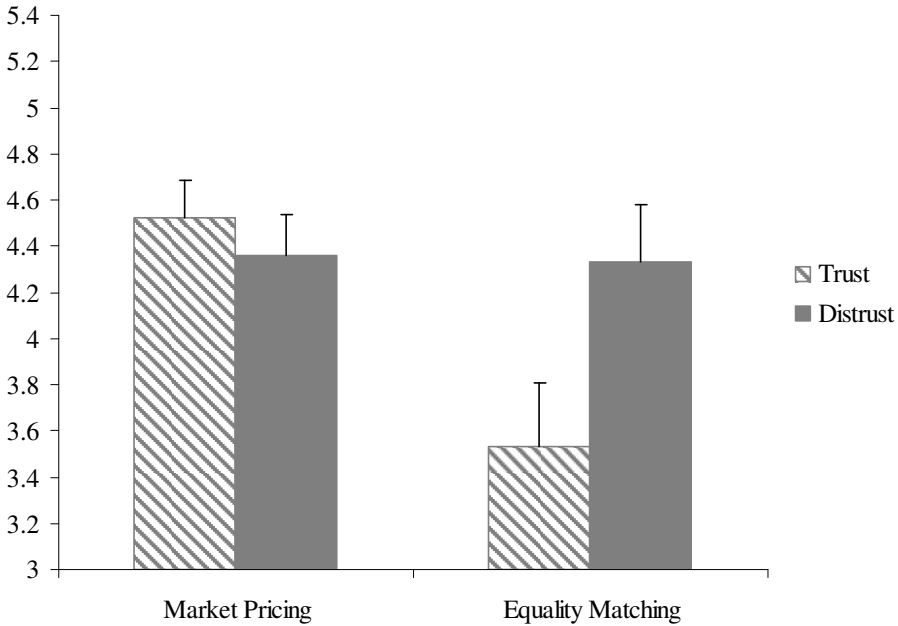
		Trustworthy face	Untrustworthy face
EM relationship	Mean	3.53 <sup>a</sup>	4.33 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	1.04	0.99
MP relationship	Mean	4.52 <sup>b</sup>	4.36 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	0.69	0.86

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*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p < .05$ ).

**Figure 3.2**

*Agent Judgments as a Function of Relationship Frame and Face Trustworthiness, Study 1*



***Discussion***

The results of this first study are in line with our expectations. When an MP relationship frame was salient, facial trustworthiness did not influence the evaluation of the agent motivated by a financial gain. However, when EM was the most salient frame, an agent engaging in behavior of questionable trustworthiness was evaluated less positive when he had a face that communicated trustworthiness (rather than untrustworthiness). These results demonstrate that the effects of facial cues are not as unequivocal as previously assumed, and stress the importance of investigating the interaction between facial cues and the social context in which they are perceived. Study two

further examines the process by which relationship norms interact with the effects of facial cues.

## **Study 2**

Trustworthiness inferences from facial cues are fast and automatic (Willis & Todorov, (2006). In the second study, we examine whether relationship norms are of influence at this automatic level as well. In reality, salespersons usually don't explicitly communicate to you that they work for a store or company. Instead, the applicable relationship frame is activated by cues in this interaction and the context in which it occurs. As a result, the relationship frame that guides you through the interaction with this person is made salient in an unobtrusive manner. In the second study, we examined whether unobtrusively activated relationship frames provide a norm that is used to interpret (ambiguous) behavior of word-of-mouth agents.

Aarts and Dijksterhuis (2003) showed that people who were exposed to pictures of a library (with the norm to be silent), tended to lower their voice in a subsequent task. Similarly, Aarts, Dijksterhuis and Custers (2003) demonstrated that activating a conformity norm (by priming respondents with words like comply, obey, and conform) caused people to behave more norm confirming. Norms thus may influence behavior in an automatic manner, without any conscious intent or awareness. In a similar vein, we predict that the mere activation of relationship norms will influence how we perceive and judge the behaviors of our interaction partners. In Study 2, we manipulated relationship norms unobtrusively via a priming manipulation. Thus, in contrast to Study 1, the information presented in the word of mouth scenario is identical across all conditions. We predicted a pattern similar to the one found in Study 1. That is, when an MP relationship frame is made salient, facial trustworthiness should not influence the evaluation of an agent looking for a financial gain. However, when an EM relationship is made salient, the same

agent should be evaluated more positively when he has an untrustworthy face than when he has a trustworthy face.

### **Method**

*Participants.* One hundred and six students (50 male and 56 female, mean age  $M = 21.00$  years old) participated in exchange for a small gift.

*Procedure.* Participants sat behind a computer screen, in individual cubicles. In order to activate the different relationship frames as unobtrusively as possible, we told participants that the experiment consisted of separate and unrelated parts. The first part (the relationship activation manipulation) was introduced as research on word recognition speed. This was a word search paradigm (adapted from van den Berg, Manstead, van der Pligt, & Wigboldus, 2006); participants got a 10 x 9 letter matrix, in which they had to search for 14 hidden words. In the MP relationship condition, these words were related to the marketplace (e.g. buying, costs, store). In the EM condition, the words were related to equal others (e.g. colleague, balance, reciprocal). A pretest confirmed that the words were categorized as belonging to the intended relationship,  $t(92) = 35.56$ ,  $p < .01$  ( $M_{MP} = 7.67$ ,  $SD_{MP} = 1.05$ ;  $M_{EM} = 3.73$ ,  $SD_{EM} = 0.71$ , measured on a 9-point scale where 1 = typical EM and 9 = typical MP).

After completing this word-search task, the ‘second’ task was introduced. This was similar to the task in Study 1. Participants were again presented with a face (the same faces as used in Study 1), and a scenario. The scenario was adapted and read as follows:

*“Imagine being allocated for a class assignment to Paul, a fellow student who you don’t know. For a meeting, he brought a new magazine with him, which is focused on your field of study. An article from this magazine helps you with accomplishing the assignment. Paul is very enthusiastic about the journal. After your meeting, he gives you his copy, so that you can have a closer look at it. When you are at home, you notice the following coupon:”*

After pressing enter, the coupon appeared on the screen. This was a ‘member-get-member’ type of coupon, stating that the current member would receive a € 10 gift voucher for every new member. Paul himself had already filled out his name and subscription number (we presented this impression by using a blue-colored ‘handwriting’ font). We asked respondents to judge Paul on the same scales as used in the first study, and checked again whether they indeed noticed the financial reward.

### **Results**

Again, we excluded all respondents who did not indicate that Paul would receive money if they would subscribe (22 respondents, equally distributed across conditions,  $\chi^2(1) < 1$ ; which is in line with the unobtrusiveness of relationship activation in this study<sup>8</sup>). We performed an ANOVA with the remaining 84 respondents with relationship frame and trustworthiness as independent variables and ‘agent impression’ ( $\alpha = .84$ ) as the dependent variable. The expected interaction between relationship frame and trustworthiness was significant,  $F(1,80) = 5.95, p < .05$ .

Specific comparisons demonstrated that when the EM relationship frame was made salient, an agent with an untrustworthy face was evaluated more positively ( $M = 4.89, SD = 0.79$ ) than an agent with a trustworthy face ( $M = 4.12, SD = 1.00$ ; see Table 3.2 for means and SD’s),  $F(1,80) = 6.67, p = .01$ . Within the MP relationship context, there was no effect of trustworthiness ( $F < 1$ ). Main effects of trustworthiness and relationship frame were not significant ( $F$ ’s  $< 1$ ; see Figure 3.3).

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<sup>8</sup> For excluding these respondents, the same line of reasoning as for Study 1 applies (see also footnote 7), results are also in the same direction when looking at the complete sample.

**Table 3.2**

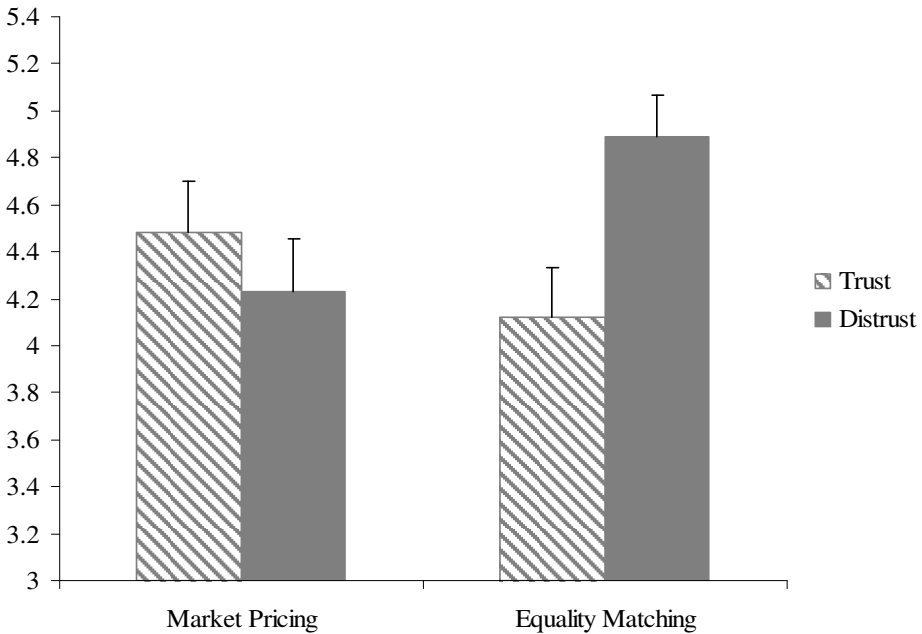
*Agent Judgments as a Function of Relationship Frame and Face Trustworthiness, Study 2 (Means and SD's)*

		Trustworthy face	Untrustworthy face
EM relationship	Mean	4.12 <sup>a</sup>	4.89 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	1.00	0.79
MP relationship	Mean	4.48 <sup>a,b</sup>	4.23 <sup>a,b</sup>
	SD	0.98	1.05

*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p < .05$ ).

**Figure 3.3**

*Agent Judgments as a Function of Relationship Frame and Face Trustworthiness, Study 2*



### ***Discussion***

In this second study, we replicated the effects of Study 1 and provided more insight into the process by which these relationship norms impact our evaluations. Even when relationship norms were made salient unobtrusively, by means of an unrelated task, they moderated the effect of facial cues on the evaluation of behavior. Again, agents with untrustworthy faces were evaluated more positively than agents with trustworthy faces when EM norms were made salient, but not when MP norms were made salient. The fact that the impact of facial cues is moderated by seemingly irrelevant concepts activated in an unobtrusive manner demonstrates the automatic and associative nature of these effects. The unobtrusive priming manipulation excludes the possibility that participants engaged in deliberative, attributional inferences on the basis of the activated relationship norm (see Johar, 2005). We thereby show that our effects are not caused by the fact that people deliberately use the relationship information to interpret facial characteristics (e.g., ‘well, you might look trustworthy, but you are still a salesperson, so I won’t trust your advice anyhow’). Rather, our results show that subtle activation of concepts related to these relationships, can already influence evaluations. This implies that relationship norms can have an influence on evaluations at a rather automatic nature.

### **General Discussion**

The current studies examined how the social context and the traits inferred from facial characteristics interact when evaluating an interaction partner. We showed that facial characteristics that are, in general, valued positively, do not by definition lead to more favorable evaluations of the persons possessing these characteristics. Their influence is moderated by the social context. In line with Fiske (1992), we argued and demonstrated in two studies that trustworthiness is more important in an equality matching relationship than in a market pricing relationship. As a result, people use facial cues indicating



(un)trustworthiness to a lesser extent within MP relationships than in EM relationships. Previous research emphasized the speed and automaticity by which we infer trustworthiness from a face (Willis & Todorov, 2006). The current absence of an evaluation effect when an MP relationship was made salient indicates that the effects of this spontaneous inference process can easily be overridden by subtle cues in the social context.

In situations where trust is important (as within equality matching relationships), the degree to which the face communicates trustworthiness does impact the evaluations of an agent. When confronted with an untrustworthy face and subsequently with actual untrustworthy behavior, the behavior confirms your first impressions and results in less negative evaluations than when you started of with a trustworthy first impression. In situations where trust is less of an issue (like market pricing relationships) these effects were not found.

We showed this moderation effect with two different methods, which provides insight into the underlying process. In the first study, the relationship manipulation was part of the target scenario that also contained the crucial behavioral information. In the second study, the relationship manipulation was part of an unobtrusive priming method that was independent of the target scenario. Both methods resulted in the same interaction effect between facial trustworthiness and relationship frames on the evaluation of the agent. This indicates that the traits people infer from facial cues can be moderated by both explicitly communicated relationship norms and much more subtle processes such as relationship constructs that are temporarily activated at the moment of interaction with an agent.

An important implication of the current research is that it demonstrates how effects of facial characteristics may be moderated by (subtle) cues in the social context. Hassin and Trope (2000) examined ‘reading from faces’ (RFF; inferring personality traits from faces) and the ‘reading into faces’ (RIF; judging facial cues in line with information about personality) processes. Our research adds to this line of research by showing an important moderator of the effects of the RFF process. We showed that the characteristics people read

from faces do not automatically transfer into evaluations about this person, but that the social context in which we encounter this person has a crucial impact on these evaluations.



## Chapter 4

### Group Membership and Word-of-Mouth Recommendations<sup>9</sup>

Imagine being at a conference with a group fellow consumer researchers. At the same moment, there is an engineering conference from a local company going on in the same conference center. People encounter each other during breaks and in central areas like the elevators and the bathrooms. Besides a clear difference in clothing style, the name tags are an immediate and obvious signal of which of the two conferences someone attends. Furthermore, since the engineers are locals, their accent also clearly indicates their background. In the elevator, a consumer researcher overhears a discussion between the engineers about the various restaurants in the neighborhood. The engineers are all relatively positive about the food, but not about the atmosphere. Some of them went to Restaurant A, which they liked, whereas others went Restaurant B and are not enthusiastic about it. How does the opinion of these engineers (out-group members) influence the likelihood that the consumer researcher goes to Restaurant A or B? And how different would this intention have been if the other people in the elevator were also consumer researchers (in-group members)?

In the current paper, we examine how people react to out-group recommendations, and we argue that out-group opinions are not of relatively less influence on the own opinions (which would imply that people are relatively neutral after both a positive and a negative recommendation), but that people can react to these out-group opinions by reporting an own opinion that clearly differentiates them from the out-group (and actually be more likely to go to the restaurant the engineers did not like than to the restaurant they did like).

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<sup>9</sup> Based on Tuk, Verlegh, Smidts and Wigboldus (2008c)

### ***Group Membership and Persuasion***

According to social categorization and social identity theories (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1982), people see themselves not only as individuals, but also as members of a group. Seeing oneself as a group member compared to as an individual has a substantial influence on the evaluation of others and oneself, on allocation of resources and on how people process information received from others (e.g., Brewer & Miller, 1996).

There is ample research that investigates group membership and persuasion. For example, there is research that has examined whether group membership (in-group versus out-group) can lead to a difference in processing strategies of the persuasive message (Van Knippenberg, 1999). In terms of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Wegener, 1998), source characteristics (like expertise) are seen as cues for peripheral processing. However, as argued by Van Knippenberg (see also Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990; McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson, & Turner, 1994), even though in-group membership is also a source characteristic, it can serve as a cue for more systematic processing. In-group members are people who are similar to us and share the same opinions (Mackie et al., 1990), which causes people to process their persuasive messages in a more systematic way than persuasive messages from out-group members. As a consequence, a difference in argument quality of persuasive messages has a bigger impact on the opinion of the persuasion target when this message comes from an in-group compared to an out-group member. Mackie, Worth and Asuncion (1990) showed that this effect is stronger when the topic of persuasion is relevant for the in-group. Salience of group membership is another cue that determines the extensiveness of processing of persuasive messages. McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson and Turner (1994) argue and show that the effects of group membership on persuasion are stronger when group membership is salient than when this membership is not salient.

The above described research leads us to conclude that in general in-group members are more persuasive than out-group members, but this effect can become stronger or weaker, depending on several moderators. What remains

unclear is how people react exactly towards persuasion attempts from out-group members. It could be that out-group members have less impact on attitudes than in-group members; this implies that people adjust their opinions more towards an opinion advocated by an in-group member than towards the opinion of an out-group member. However, as suggested by the distinctiveness literature (e.g., Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004), people can also differentiate their opinions away from the opinion of an out-group member.

### ***Group Membership and Differentiation Tendencies***

People have strong intentions to differentiate themselves from out-groups. In a meta-analysis examining intergroup differentiation, Jetten et al. (2004) showed that people differentiate in terms of money or resource allocation, and in terms of stereotyping and judgment (highlighting intergroup differences by judging the out-group members as even more different than they already are, or by judging both in-group and out-group members more in line with existing stereotypes).

There is some recent research in the area of consumer behavior that shows a similar effect (Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005; White & Dahl, 2006, 2008). A general conclusion from this research is that people have a preference for products that are associated with groups they want to belong to, and want to avoid products associated with groups they do not want to belong to. For example, Escalas and Bettman (2005) showed that people have stronger self-brand connections when the brand is associated with the in-group and that people are inclined to use products that are associated with groups where they wish to belong to, their aspiration groups. Furthermore, Berger and Heath (2007) showed that people also have a tendency to avoid products that are preferred by a majority (in order to signal their own, unique identity), and to avoid products that signal an out-group identity. This effect was also stronger for people with a high need for uniqueness compared to people with a lower need for uniqueness. People seem to use products to diverge from others and in that way signal their own (unique) identity.

In line with this, White and Dahl (2006; 2008) examined the impact of dissociative reference groups (groups where people do not want to be associated with; e.g., teenagers do not want to have the same products as their parents) on consumer preferences. They showed that people report weaker self-brand connections and are less inclined to choose a brand when this brand is associated with an out-group, and in particular when the out-group is a dissociative out-group. This effect was even stronger when the brand was a symbolic brand, when respondents were primed with their own identity, and for respondents who identify relatively highly with the in-group. The more identification with the own group is salient, the more people try to avoid being associated with dissociative reference groups (see also Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998).

### ***The Persuasiveness of Out-Groups***

As we discussed above, previous research showed that persuasion attempts from in-group members in general led to a greater adjustment of attitude in the direction advocated by the in-group member than in the direction advocated by the out-group member. People assimilate their own attitudes towards the attitude of the in-group member. However, this does not provide unequivocal evidence for the precise impact of a persuasive message from an out-group member. If the persuasive message is positive, and people are more positive about the object of persuasion when the message comes from the in-group than from the out-group, this can be due to relatively more persuasiveness of the in-group than of the out-group member (people are more positive after the in-group opinion than after the out-group opinion), but also due to a differentiation away from the out-group (people are positive after a positive in-group opinion, but tend to be negative when this same opinion came from an out-group member). However, both explanations do predict a different pattern of results when examining the effect of information valence within the out-group. A “difference-in-persuasiveness” account predicts that persuasive messages from in-group members lead to more extreme opinions than persuasive messages from out-group members. A “differentiation-tendency”

account predicts a cross-over interaction, resulting in a shift in attitudes after persuasion attempts from out-group members; people would report more positive attitudes after a negative opinion and more negative attitudes after a positive opinion. This leads to the following predictions:

*Hypothesis 1a: People will be more positive when a positive recommendation comes from an in-group than from an out-group member.*

*Hypothesis 1b: People will be more negative when a negative recommendation comes from an in-group than from an out-group member.*

In addition to these expectations, more insight into the exact impact of out-group recommendations can only be gained when comparing the impact of recommendation valence within group membership.

*Hypothesis 2a: People will be more positive after a positive in-group recommendation than after a negative in-group recommendation.*

However, the above stated hypotheses do not provide conclusive evidence with regard to the precise impact of out-groups. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to examine which of the following hypotheses holds (see also Figures 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 for a visual representation of these hypotheses).

*Hypothesis 2b: People will be more positive after a positive out-group recommendation than after a negative out-group recommendation (“difference-in-persuasiveness” account; Figure 4.1.1).*

Or

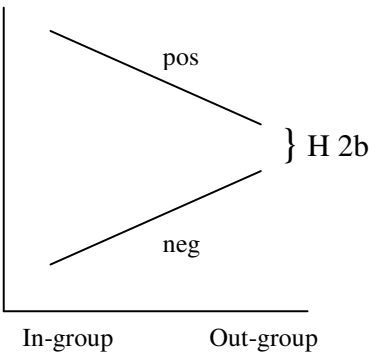
*Hypothesis 2c: People will be more negative after a positive out-group recommendation than after a negative out-group recommendation (“differentiation-tendency” account; Figure 4.1.2).*

So, whereas both Hypothesis 1a and 1b, and Hypothesis 2a can be expected from both the perspective that recommendations from in-group members are

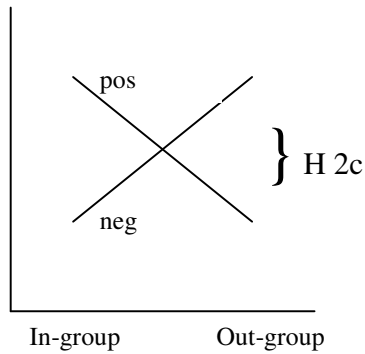


more influential than recommendations from out-group members, and from a differentiation perspective, confirming Hypothesis 2b or 2c would be the crucial test for the “differentiation-tendency” account.

**Figure 4.1.1** *predicted pattern*  
*“difference-in-persuasion”*



**Figure 4.1.2** *predicted pattern*  
*“differentiation-tendency”*



Showing a differentiation response in reaction to persuasion attempts from out-group members would contribute to the literature on group membership and persuasion, because this would show that the out-group is also persuasive, but in a negative direction.

In the current research, we will examine this effect with different operationalizations of groupmembership; both with real, existing groups, and with a minimal group paradigm (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Gaertner & Insko, 2000). Besides contributing to the generalizability of our results, this would show that a differentiation tendency as reaction to persuasion attempts from out-groups is not driven by the fact that people want to avoid being associated with some specific groups (of which they have, for example, a negative image), but that a mere categorization of people as belonging to our group or to another group, independent of the meaning of this categorization already induces a

differentiation reaction. This implies that a differentiation effect can occur in response to a huge variety of out-groups, and is not limited to groups were people do not want to belong to. Showing an effect with real groups contributes to the external validity of the results, whereas minimal groups provide insights in the underlying nature of the effects.

From a more practical perspective, it would be very interesting and relevant to show that people do not only want to avoid products that are associated with (dissociative) out-groups, but that people also show a more positive attitude to products after a negative recommendation from the out-group. For example, research on word-of-mouth in general seems to point out that negative recommendations are relatively more destructive than that positive recommendations are beneficial (Arndt, 1967; Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001). A differentiation tendency implies that negative word-of-mouth from out-group members can have positive effects on evaluations of the products.

## **Study 1**

### ***Overview***

In a series of three experiments with the same 2 (Group: In-group versus Out-group) x 2 (Recommendation Valence: Positive versus Negative) design, we aimed to test Hypotheses 1 and 2. In these three experiments, we used different manipulations of group membership, which all have their unique contributions for providing insight into the impact of group membership on reported attitudes. In Study 1A, the in-group – out-group manipulation was based on real, existing groups (two different groups of students). This shows that the effects of group membership are externally valid, and provides a realistic setting for the respondents. However, the disadvantage of this manipulation is that people might have different assumptions about these two groups (in the current studies, the target product is a painting, and people might, for example, think that the different student groups differ with regard to

painter preferences, or art knowledge). In Study 1B, the categorization was meaningful for the subsequent task (based on preferences for the same or a different painter, and with a painting as the target product of evaluation), but furthermore not based on real, existing differences between the groups. The added value of this categorization is that it rules out any implicit assumptions with regard to the art knowledge of the recommending person. This would show that the differentiation effect also occurs when it is clear that both the in-group and the out-group member have the same amount of knowledge about the target category (i.e., paintings). Furthermore, this categorization makes it unlikely that any implicit assumptions that people may have with regard to painter preferences of an in-group versus an out-group member have an unforeseen impact on the results, since painter preferences are explicitly mentioned. Finally, in Study 1C, we used a minimal group paradigm. The added value of a minimal group paradigm is that it rules out all alternative explanations that are related to other group categorizations, and thereby provides most conclusive evidence with regard to a purely social categorization based effect. The disadvantage of such a paradigm, is the artificial nature; being categorized in groups you are completely unfamiliar with, might be odd or hard to believe. Considering the advantages and disadvantages of the above mentioned manipulations, we think that the combination of these different methods provides important and complimentary insights, and that the combined results of these studies gives strong evidence for the hypothesized effect.

### ***Study 1A***

#### ***Method***

*Participants.* There participated 73 business administration students (45 males and 28 females, mean age  $M = 21.5$  years old), in exchange for a course credit or € 3 (approximately \$ 4.40).

*Procedure.* The experiment was part of a series of unrelated experiments. Respondents read the cover story that the university wanted to embellish the

recently new built T-building (which is the building used by business administration on the campus; at the time of the experiment, this building was approximately 2 years old and still in a decoration phase). Instead of just following interior designers' opinions, the university was interested in the opinion of the students. To make the whole cover story as reliable as possible, we told respondents that we first wanted to get a general impression of their art preferences, and asked them to choose 5 times between 2 paintings. Then we told them that it is often difficult to form an impression of a painting based on just a picture of this painting. Therefore, the university selected some students who saw the actual paintings that we (the university) were considering to buy. These students gave their opinions about the painting they saw, and the participant would first read this opinion, before seeing a picture of the target painting. The opinion contained the manipulation of in-group – out-group and the manipulation of opinion valence. The in-group – out-group manipulation was based on the type of study program the referring student was enrolled in. Within the university, there is a study program in economics, and a study program in business administration. Students with master degrees in either one of these programs compete on the job market for the same jobs, and the programs compete for the same high school students. However, these two programs are completely separate; lectures and study facilities are often in different buildings, and both programs have a complete different teaching staff. Students in business administration versus economics provides a context of relevant and comparable in-group and out-group members (note that all participants were business administration students; the business administration student in the scenario was thus always an in-group member and the economics student an out-group member). Participants read the following (manipulations between brackets):

A second year student in business administration (economics), has the following opinion about this painting:

*“I found the painting special, (but it does fit /and not fitting) with the university. The university tries to create a professional and international atmosphere, and this painting (conveys exactly/ does not convey) this meaning. Personally, I think it is (beautiful/ ugly). I would (love/ not like) to see this painting in the university.”*

Then a picture of the target painting appeared on the screen, and the respondents could form an impression of this painting themselves. As a dependent measure, we measured respondents’ opinion of the painting by asking how beautiful they found the painting (7-point scale ranging from 1 = ugly to 7 = beautiful). In order to measure suspicion, we added an open question probing for any hypothesis awareness.

**Results**

None of the respondents showed signs of hypothesis awareness. An ANOVA with group and valence as between subjects factors showed a significant interaction between group and valence,  $F(1,69) = 4.94, p < .05$ . Simple main effect analyses revealed that, in line with Hypothesis 1a, respondents were indeed (marginally) more positive about the painting after the positive in-group recommendation ( $M = 4.67, SD = 0.84$ ) than after the positive out-group recommendation ( $M = 3.71, SD = 1.86$ ),  $F(1,69) = 3.67, p < .06$  (see Table 4.1 for means and SD’s).

**Table 4.1**

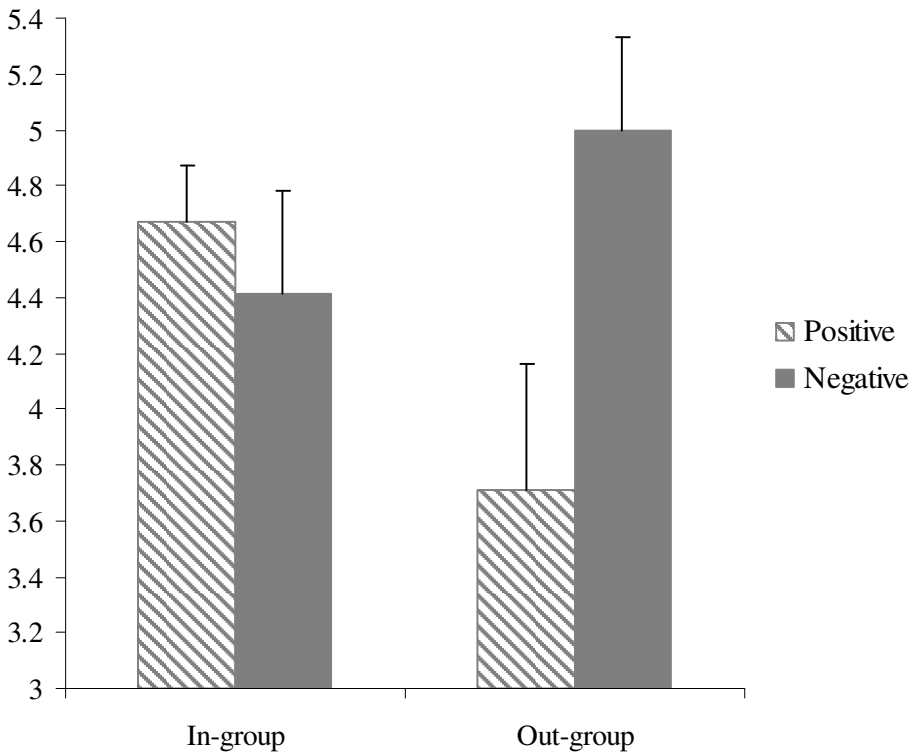
*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Means and SD’s; Study 1A)*

		Positive recomb.	Negative recomb.
In-group	Mean	4.67 <sup>a</sup>	4.41 <sup>a,b</sup>
	SD	0.84	1.54
Out-group	Mean	3.71 <sup>b</sup>	5.00 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	1.86	1.52

*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p < .06$ ).

**Figure 4.2**

*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Study 1A)*



However, contrary to Hypothesis 1b, the difference in liking after a negative in-group versus out-group recommendation, failed to reach significance,  $p > .10$  (see Figure 4.2). Hypothesis 2a was also not confirmed, there was no significant difference in painting evaluation after a positive versus a negative in-group recommendation,  $p > .10$ . Most importantly, the results did support Hypothesis 2c and not Hypothesis 2b; respondents were more positive about the painting after a negative out-group recommendation ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD =$

1.52) than after a positive out-group recommendation ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ),  $F(1,69) = 7.16$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### ***Discussion***

Our results partly support our expectations. In line with Hypothesis 1a, people were more positive about the painting after a positive in-group recommendation than after a positive out-group recommendation. However, there was no difference in painting evaluation after a negative recommendation from either an in-group or an out-group member (Hypothesis 1b). Contrary to Hypothesis 2a, respondents did not show assimilation towards the in-group opinion. We found support for Hypothesis 2c and not for 2b, the respondents were relatively more positive about the painting after the negative out-group recommendation than after the positive out-group recommendation, which indicates a differentiation intention. People expressed an opinion that is clearly different from the one advocated by the out-group. This supports our claim that out-group members do not exert less influence on attitudes, but that people can also be influenced by out-group members in a direction that is opposite from the one advocated by this out-group member.

In order to generalize our results beyond this specific intergroup context (business versus economics students) used in Study 1A, and to rule out alternative explanations that might be related to the ideas that these groups have about each other (e.g., people might think that business administration students do not have a lot of art knowledge, which would explain a lack of effect within the in-group), we conducted Study 1B. In Study 1B, categorization is based on painter preferences. This is a very plausible categorization for the respondents considering the target task, and at the same time reduces any possible implicit assumptions about the recommending agent with regard to the target product (art).

## **Study 1B**

### **Method**

*Participants.* There participated 83 students (43 males and 40 females, mean age  $M = 22.4$  years old) in exchange for a course credit.

*Procedure.* The experiment was part of a series of unrelated experiments. The procedure was for a major part comparable to the procedure of Study 1A. However, this time we used the first task (choosing five times between two paintings by clicking on a “painting A” or a “painting B” button underneath the paintings on the screen) as the manipulation of in-group – out-group (adapted from Gaertner & Insko, 2000). After this task, we randomly assigned the respondents to bogus feedback about their preferences. Half of the respondents read that in 80% of the cases they chose a painting of the painter Klee, and that they belonged to the group of students who have a preference for the painter Klee. The other half received the same feedback, but for the painter Kandinsky. The opinion about the painting was given by a business administration student who allegedly either had a strong preference for Klee or for Kandinsky. We completely counterbalanced this assignment, and coded group as ‘in-group’ when both respondent and recommending student were categorized as preferring the same painter, and as out-group when there was a mismatch in painter preference categorization (e.g., respondent preferred Klee and student Kandinsky or vice versa). The opinion that this recommending student gave about the painting and the painting itself were the same as we used in Study 1. We again asked for liking of the painting and checked for suspicion, and added two manipulation checks where we asked if the student still remembered his own painter preference and the preference of the student who gave his opinion about the target painting.

### **Results**

We removed the data of seven respondents who did not correctly recall either their own group membership or the group membership of the recommending student, leaving 76 students.



An ANOVA with group and valence as between subjects factors again showed a significant interaction for liking,  $F(1, 72) = 6.22, p = .01$ . Contrast analyses revealed the same pattern of results as we found in Study 1. In line with Hypothesis 1a, we found that respondents were more positive about the painting when the positive opinion came from the in-group ( $M = 4.76, SD = 1.73$ ) compared to when the positive opinion came from the out-group ( $M = 3.29, SD = 1.90$ ),  $F(1, 72) = 7.11, p < .01$  (see Table 4.2 for means and SD's). The attitude of the respondent after the negative opinion did not differ significantly between the in-group and the out-group,  $p > .10$  (contrary to Hypothesis 1b).

We again did not find evidence for Hypothesis 2a; respondents did not differ in liking of the painting after a positive versus a negative in-group opinion. Hypothesis 2c was supported; when the opinion came from the out-group member, respondents were more positive about the painting when the recommending student was negative ( $M = 4.78, SD = 1.80$ ) than when the recommending student was positive about the painting ( $M = 3.29, SD = 1.90$ ),  $F(1, 72) = 6.71, p = .01$  (see Figure 4.3).

**Table 4.2**

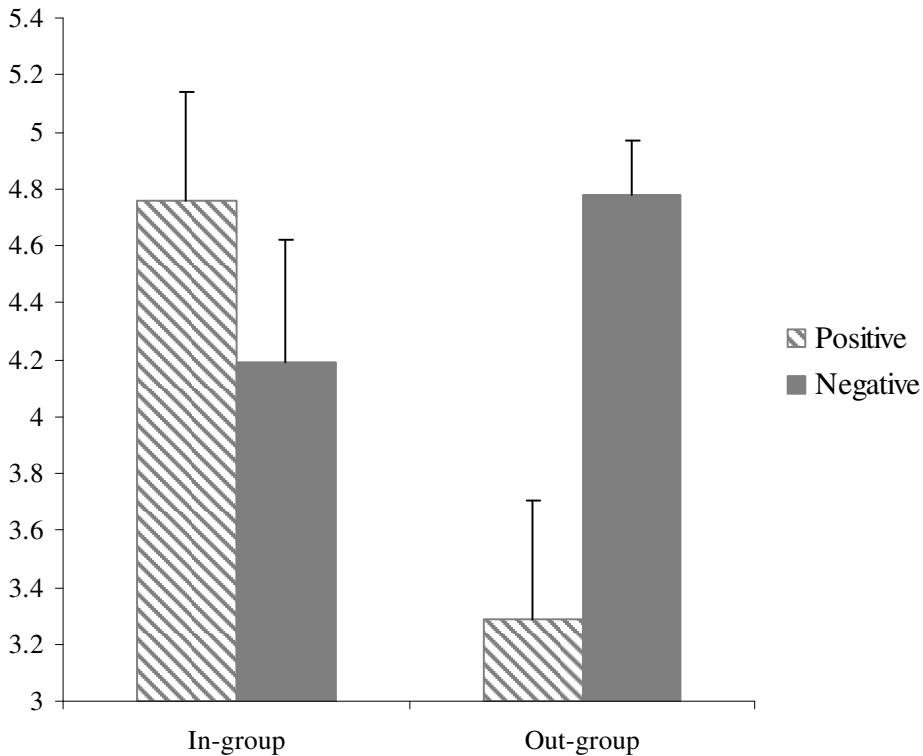
*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Means and SD's; Study 1B)*

		Positive recomm.	Negative recomm.
In-group	Mean	4.76 <sup>a</sup>	4.19 <sup>a,b</sup>
	SD	1.73	1.72
Out-group	Mean	3.29 <sup>b</sup>	4.78 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	1.90	1.80

*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p \leq .01$ ).

**Figure 4.3**

*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Study 1B)*



**Discussion**

The results of Study 1B replicate and extend Study 1A. Our results again show a differentiation effect, in line with Hypothesis 2c and not Hypothesis 2b, but no assimilation effect towards the in-group (no difference in evaluations of the painting after a positive versus a negative in-group recommendation). A

positive opinion leads to more liking when this opinion came from an in-group member than when it came from an out-group member. We used a different group categorization manipulation (based on artificial group categories), which generalizes the results of Study 1A. We showed that the results are not dependent upon a clear impression that people already have about existing groups, and we ruled out a difference in art knowledge or any implicit inferences of people with regard to art preferences of the recommending student as alternative explanations. However, one might object that the categorization label (in favor of the painter Klee or Kandinsky) of the referring student contained relevant information with regard to the target task (evaluating a painting). If someone else likes another painting than you do, it is plausible that this will hold for a variety of paintings, and people will thus not agree with his opinion about any painting. In Study 1C, we will examine whether people also differentiate their opinions based on a minimal group paradigm categorization. This shows that a differentiation tendency is not a way to signal that people want to differentiate themselves from specific groups (for example because people have a negative impression of that particular group), but from everyone who is categorized as belonging to another group than the own group.

### ***Study 1C***

#### ***Method***

*Participants.* There participated 182 students in this experiment, 108 males and 74 females with a mean age  $M = 21.7$  years old, in exchange for a course credit.

*Procedure.* The experiment was part of a series of unrelated experiments. For the in-group – out-group classification, we used an adapted version of the dot estimation task (Gerard & Hoyt, 1974; Jetten et al., 1998). We told respondents that recent research suggested that people can be classified into two broad categories; those with a general tendency to overestimate things (a “Type A estimator”) and those with a general tendency to underestimate things

(a “Type B estimator”). The cover story made clear that, especially within consumer behavior settings, this could be an important characteristic, because people can either over- or underestimate price, sizes, quantities, etc. We told respondents that we were developing and validating a new test to measure this personality trait. The task was to estimate the amount of figures they saw on a computer screen. These figures were circles, stars, squares, etc, and they appeared on the screen for 4 seconds. The amount randomly varied between 125 and 200, and after every screen, respondents were asked to indicate how many figures they thought they had seen. After repeating this procedure eight times, respondents received the bogus feedback that they were either a Type A estimator (overestimator) or a Type B estimator (underestimator)<sup>10</sup>. Respondents received this estimator feedback randomly and irrespective of their actual estimations. The recommendation this time came from a Type A or Type B estimator, and was similar to the one used before in Study 1A and 1B, as were the painting, the dependent variable and the manipulation checks.

### **Results**

We coded respondents as hypothesis aware when they reported that we were examining the relative degree of persuasiveness of the own group in comparison to the other group (and in this way showing awareness of the fact that we used a categorization task to examine relative persuasiveness of different groups). This time, there were many students who could not correctly recall both their own classification and the classification of the referring agent ( $N = 18$ ), or they showed suspicion towards the real purpose of the experiment ( $N = 52$ ; which led to exclusion of 67 students in total, note that 3 respondents did not correctly recall the classification and were hypothesis aware)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> We labeled over- and underestimators as Type A and Type B in order to prevent as much content related thinking as possible.

<sup>11</sup> These respondents did not differ from the other respondents in terms of age, gender or estimations made on the estimation task. If we included these respondents in the analyses, all the cell means are in the same directions, and the simple main effect analysis for valence within out-group was still significant ( $p < .02$ ), but the interaction between group and valence was not significant anymore ( $p < .14$ ).

Previous research using the dot estimation task either kept this information salient for the respondents during the rest of the procedure (Gerard & Hoyt, 1974), or used an additional manipulation to increase in-group identification (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996; Jetten et al., 1998), and does not report comparable manipulation checks. Given the slightly artificial nature of the procedure (getting information about whether the student is a business administration or an economics student, or whether he likes the same paintings as you do or different ones, as we used in Studies 1A and 1B, is much more realistic for the respondents than getting information about an over- or underestimation tendency), the relatively large sample reporting hypothesis awareness is not very surprising or remarkable. We removed them from the sample, leaving 115 respondents.

An ANOVA with group and valence as between subjects factors revealed a marginally significant interaction effect for liking,  $F(1, 111) = 3.65, p < .06$  (see Table 4.3 for means and SD's). The previously found positive effect of positive information coming from an in-group member ( $M = 4.35, SD = 1.63$ ) compared to positive information from an out-group member ( $M = 3.64, SD = 1.58$ ) was marginally significant in this study,  $F(1,111) = 2.67, p = .10$  (in line with Hypothesis 1a); whereas the difference in painting evaluation after the negative recommendations from either an in-group or an out-group was again not significant,  $p > .10$  (contrary to Hypothesis 1b).

**Table 4.3**

*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Means and SD's; Study 1C)*

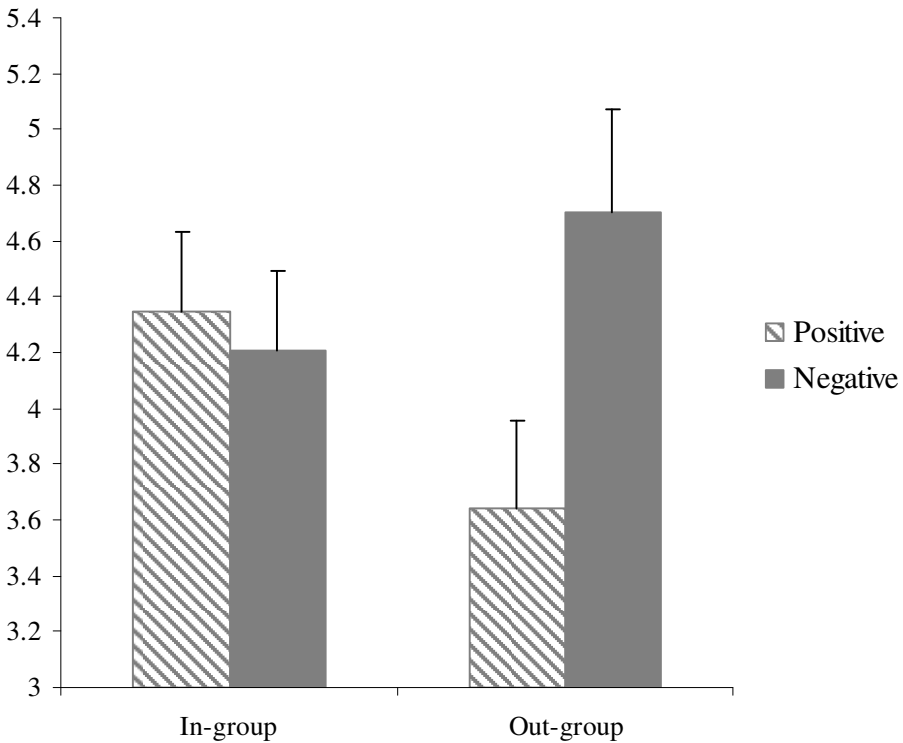
		Positive recomm.	Negative recomm.
In-group	Mean	4.35 <sup>a</sup>	4.21 <sup>a,c</sup>
	SD	1.63	1.63
Out-group	Mean	3.64 <sup>b</sup>	4.70 <sup>c</sup>
	SD	1.58	1.79

*Note.* Cells with the superscript a and b differ from each other at  $p = .10$ ; cells with the superscript b and c differ from each other at  $p < .05$ .

When the recommendation came from the in-group member, there was no effect of information valence (again not confirming Hypothesis 2a). We again found support for Hypothesis 2c and not Hypothesis 2b, when the recommendation came from the out-group member, respondents were more positive about the painting after a negative recommendation ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ) than after a positive recommendation ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ),  $F(1,111) = 4.88$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4**

*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Study 1C)*



### **Discussion**

Study 1C also partially supports our hypotheses. Most important, respondents were again less positive after the positive out-group opinion than after the negative out-group opinion, confirming the dissociation hypothesis (Hypothesis 2c). However, none of the studies showed any signals of assimilation towards the in-group in the sense that people were not more positive about the painting after the positive in-group opinion than after the negative in-group opinion (Hypothesis 2a). We did find in the above described studies that respondents reported more positive attitudes about a product after a positive in-group recommendation than after a positive out-group recommendation (Hypothesis 1a). This finding is in line with the previously found effect of persuasion attempts from in-group versus out-group members (e.g., Van Knippenberg, 1999). However, we also consistently found that the opinion of people is affected by out-group members. Our results show that people are influenced by persuasion attempts from out-group members, by reporting attitudes that are clearly different from the opinion that is propagated by the recommending agent, in such a way that they were less positive about the product when the out-group member made a positive recommendation, than when this out-group member made a negative recommendation (Hypothesis 2c).

These results support our reasoning that persuasion attempts from out-group members can have an important impact on the attitudes of people, but in such a way that they differentiate their own attitudes away from the position advocated by the out-group member. We showed this effect with various manipulations of group membership, which all have their own strengths and weaknesses. Study 1A shows a differentiation effect for recommendations from real, existing groups. This shows the external validity of the results. Study 1B rules out potential alternative explanations with regard to (art) preferences of the recommendation agents, and Study 1C shows that even a very artificial and minimal categorization already leads to differentiation. Together, they do provide a strong case for the differentiation tendency.

Even though the positive and the negative valenced opinion are equivalent to each other, one might object that people react differently to these two types of information, and that examining a group effect within either the positive and the negative opinion conditions (Hypotheses 1a and 1b) provides important additional evidence. We were able to find support for Hypothesis 1a with the individual studies, but could not confirm Hypothesis 1b. However, the means of all individual studies are in the direction that we expected in Hypothesis 1b. Given the relatively large standard deviations that we found in the individual studies (with 1.90 as highest), and which might be easily explained by the nature of the target task (there are huge interpersonal differences in art preferences), we conducted a pooled analysis over the three studies.

In this pooled analysis, we added “experiment” as covariate, to control for experiment related differences. Experiment type was not a significant covariate, and also did not interact significantly with valence and group membership, all  $F$ 's < 1. The pooled analysis revealed that there was again a significant interaction between group and valence,  $F(1,259) = 13.02$ ,  $p < .001$ . In line with the results of the individual studies, respondents were more positive about the painting after the negative out-group recommendation ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) compared to the positive out-group recommendation ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ),  $F(1,259) = 19.05$ ,  $p < .001$ , (differentiation effect; Hypothesis 2c), and, in line with Hypothesis 1a, respondents were significantly more positive about the painting after a positive opinion from an in-group member ( $M = 4.51$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) than after a positive opinion from an out-group member ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ),  $F(1,259) = 9.74$ ,  $p < .01$  (see Table 4.4 for means and SD's of the pooled analysis).

Most importantly, the pooled analysis also confirmed Hypothesis 1b, the difference in opinion after a negative out-group recommendation compared with a negative in-group recommendation was also significant,  $F(1,259) = 3.84$ ,  $p = .05$ . Respondents were more positive about the painting when the negative opinion came from an out-group member ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ) than when the negative opinion came from an in-group member ( $M = 4.35$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ; see Figure 4.5).



**Table 4.4**

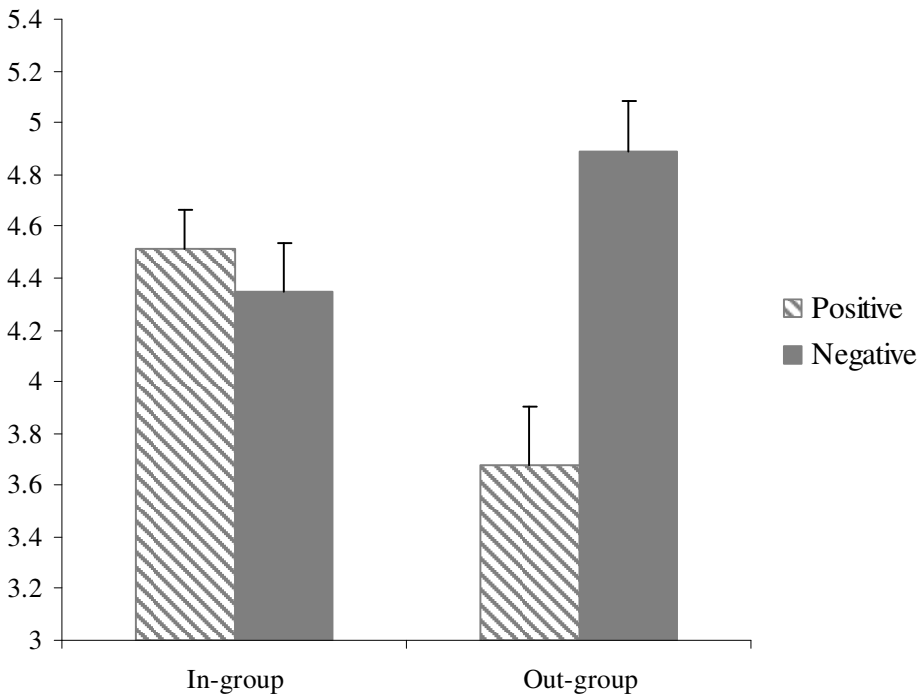
*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Means and SD's; Pooled Analysis, Studies 1A, 1B and 1C)*

		Positive recomb.	Negative recomb.
In-group	Mean	4.51 <sup>a</sup>	4.35 <sup>a</sup>
	SD	1.28	1.56
Out-group	Mean	3.68 <sup>b</sup>	4.89 <sup>c</sup>
	SD	1.72	1.59

*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p \leq .05$ ).

**Figure 4.5**

*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Membership and Recommendation Valence (Pooled Analysis, Studies 1A, 1B and 1C)*



This pooled analysis showed that a differentiation effect was present both when looking at the effects within the out-group (more positive after a negative recommendation than after a positive recommendation, as was the case in the individual studies) and when looking at the effects of group membership in response to both the positive and the negative recommendation. Respondents were significantly more positive after a positive in-group recommendation than after a positive out-group recommendation, and they were significantly more positive after a negative out-group recommendation than after a negative in-group recommendation.

The results of the above three studies and their combined results provide strong support for our hypothesized differentiation-tendency account as a response towards persuasion attempts from out-group members, which provides additional insights in the reactions of people to persuasion attempts from in-group versus out-group members.

However, in none of the studies, and not even in the pooled analysis, we were able to find an effect of opinion valence within the in-group, contrary to Hypothesis 2a. When the opinion came from the in-group member, there was no significant difference in painting evaluation as a result of a positive compared to a negative opinion; respondents did not assimilate their opinion in the direction of the opinion of the in-group member.

This (lack of) effects in the in-group condition in comparison to the out-group condition may be explained by a difference in group salience. As McGarty and colleagues (1994) argued, when group membership is relatively more salient, it has a bigger impact on the persuasiveness of the in-group member. In the above described studies, group membership could have been relatively more salient for the respondents who were confronted with an out-group member than for respondents confronted with an in-group member. To illustrate, when you are at a conference with fellow consumer researchers, this shared group membership probably becomes more salient when you and a fellow conference attendee share the elevator with a group of engineers, than when you are just with the two of you in this elevator (see Wilder & Shapiro, 1984 for evidence for such a process). The mere presence of an out-group

member can trigger awareness of the in-group. When only with in-group members, this is less likely to occur, and information will probably be processed on a more interpersonal level than on an intergroup level. Thus, the persuasive impact of in-group members is expected to be bigger when out-group members are also present, because this makes the intergroup context salient, rather than an interpersonal context.

*Hypothesis 3: People will assimilate their opinion more in the direction of an in-group opinion after confrontation with out-group members (intergroup salient) than when only confronted with the in-group (interpersonal salient).*

## Study 2

In the final experiment, we aimed to examine whether this lack of group salience indeed explains our lack of results within the in-group. In this experiment, we manipulated the salience of the group level within the in-group, by exposing half of the respondents also to the out-group category (see Wilder & Shapiro, 1984 for comparable manipulations of group salience).

### *Method*

*Participants.* There participated 113 students, 63 males and 48 females, with a mean age of  $M = 19.99$ <sup>12</sup>, in exchange for a course credit.

*Procedure.* The experiment had a 2 (Group salience: Interpersonal Salient versus Intergroup Salient) x 2 (Recommendation Valence: Positive versus Negative) design, and was part of a series of unrelated experiments. Even though it might have been a slightly more artificial manipulation of group membership, we again used the dot-estimation task of Study 1C as the categorization task. The advantage of this task is that the results are unequivocally due to a categorization effect, which is the cleanest way of testing Hypothesis 3. With this group manipulation, any effect of the group

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<sup>12</sup> Due to a programming error, personal data of 2 respondents was not saved properly.

salience manipulation is due to the salience of the categorization, and not to the salience of a specific group membership.

In addition to the dot estimation task, we told respondents that we were interested in their perception of the personalities of over- and underestimators. This task was the group salience manipulation. Half of the respondents was asked to indicate of eight traits the extent to which these traits are applicable to their own group (either over- or underestimator; 1 = not at all applicable; 7 = completely applicable), whereas the other half was asked to indicate the extent to which these traits are applicable to either over- or underestimators (1 = definitely underestimator; 7 = definitely overestimator). These traits were selected to be applicable to both overestimators and to underestimators, in order to prevent giving one of the types relatively more value (e.g. “someone who can manage his budget”; an overestimator could overestimate costs and an underestimator could underestimate the amount of money left at the end of the month). There were no significant differences in the trait ratings between over- and underestimators, which supports our claim that the traits were neutral with regard to over- versus underestimators. As a result, half of the respondents only had to think about their own group (interpersonal salient), whereas the other half had to think about their own group relative to the out-group (intergroup salient). The rest of the procedure, the recommendation, the dependent variables and the manipulation checks were the same as the ones used in Study 1C.

## **Results**

We again removed respondents who failed to answer the manipulation checks (of both their own group membership and the group membership of the recommending agent) correctly, leaving 72 respondents<sup>13</sup>.

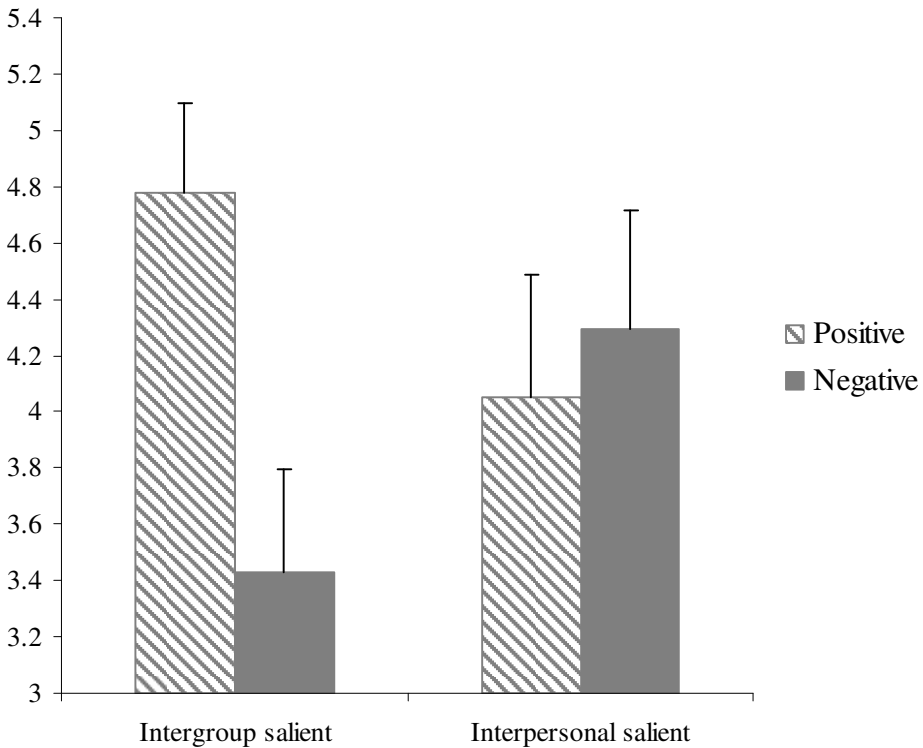
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<sup>13</sup> These respondents were equally distributed across conditions. If we include these respondents in our analyses, the cell means remain in the same direction, the interaction effect between valence and group is marginally significant ( $p < .10$ ) and the effect of valence within the intergroup salience condition remained significant ( $p = .03$ ). Suspicion remarks concerned the impact of group membership (as in Study 1c), and not the group salience manipulation. We could therefore not conclude that the respondents were hypothesis aware.

An ANOVA with group salience and valence as independent factors showed a significant interaction effect for liking of the painting,  $F(1, 68) = 3.98, p < .05$ . In line with Hypothesis 2, simple main effect analysis showed that there was a significant difference in evaluation of the painting in the intergroup salience condition, respondents were indeed more positive about the painting after the positive recommendation ( $M = 4.78, SD = 1.35$ ) than after the negative recommendation ( $M = 3.43, SD = 1.69$ ),  $F(1,68) = 6.38, p = .01$  (see Table 4.5 for means and SD's). In line with the previous studies, the difference in painting evaluation after a positive versus a negative opinion in the interpersonal salience condition was not significant,  $F < 1$  (see Figure 4.6).

**Figure 4.6**

*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Salience and Recommendation Valence (Study 2)*



**Table 4.5**

*Liking of Painting as Function of Group Salience and Recommendation Valence (Means and SD's; Study 2)*

		Positive recomm.	Negative recomm.
Interpersonal salient	Mean	4.05 <sup>a,b</sup>	4.29 <sup>a,b</sup>
	SD	1.90	1.64
Intergroup salient	Mean	4.78 <sup>a</sup>	3.43 <sup>b</sup>
	SD	1.35	1.69

*Note.* Cells with a different superscript differ significantly from each other ( $p < .05$ ).

### **Discussion**

In Study 2, we examined whether the lack of results between the positive and the negative recommendation in the in-group condition that we found in the previous studies, was due to a lack of salience that the recommending person belonged to the own in-group. In Study 2, we manipulated the salience of the intergroup context by giving half of the respondents a task that made them think about the own group, and the other half a task that made them think about both the own and the other group. We were able to show that the occurrence of assimilation towards the in-group critically depends on the salience of an intergroup context. This supports our claim that the lack of effects within the in-group condition in the previous studies was due to a lack of salience of the intergroup context.

### **General Discussion**

In a series of experiments, using various forms of group manipulations (one based on existing groups, and two artificial groups, of which one was task relevant and the other completely meaningless), we showed that people have a strong tendency to differentiate their own opinion about a product from the opinion of an out-group member. We showed that this tendency is stronger than a tendency to assimilate own opinions towards the opinion of in-group

members. That is, people were more positive about a product after a negative out-group recommendation than after a positive out-group recommendation, whereas a positive or negative recommendation from an in-group member was not sufficient to cause significant differences in the evaluations of the product.

Furthermore, respondents were relatively less positive about the product after the positive out-group opinion compared to the positive in-group opinion, and a pooled analysis over the first three studies showed that people were also more positive after a negative out-group opinion compared to the negative in-group opinion. The overall pattern of results of these studies supports our claim that people differentiate their own opinion after a persuasion attempt from an out-group member.

Remarkably, in the first 3 studies, we did not find any tendency of people to assimilate their opinions with the opinion of a fellow in-group member. Even though the recommendation was clearly positive or negative, this valence difference did not show itself in the evaluations of the painting given by the respondent. Under conditions where people can evaluate the product themselves (as was the case in the current procedure, respondents saw a picture of the painting themselves) they did differentiate from the out-group, but not assimilate with the in-group opinion. This finding is in line with previous research that shows that the out-group should be salient in order to make the in-group salient as well (Mcgarty et al., 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wilder & Shapiro, 1984). We demonstrated this with Study 2. When the mere existence of the out-group became more salient for respondents, they did assimilate their own opinions with the opinions of the in-group member. This implies that people are not influenced by the opinion of others (who are strangers for them), unless it becomes clear that they share something (group membership) that is not shared with others.

### ***The Persuasive Power of Out-groups***

We think that this research has important implications, both at a theoretical level and at a more applied level. Previous research showed that people in general are less persuaded by out-group members than by in-group members.

Furthermore, some recent research within the consumer behavior area suggests that people want to avoid products that are associated with specific groups where they do not want to be associated themselves (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005; White & Dahl, 2006, 2008). Our research contributes to this line of research by showing that a mere categorization already induces a differentiation tendency. As we showed, people are influenced by out-group opinions; they differentiate their own opinions from out-group opinions. By using both positive and negative opinions, we gained more insight into the reactions of people towards persuasion attempts from both in-group and out-group members. Previous research examined other aspects of persuasion attempts from in-groups and out-groups, like the persuasiveness of strong versus weak arguments (see Van Knippenberg, 1999). A differentiation reaction does not necessarily predict a different opinion after a strong versus a weak persuasion attempt from an out-group member, which explains why previous research did not show such a tendency. However, when comparing persuasion attempts that clearly differ in valence of the proposed position, a differentiation intention does become apparent, which results in more positive evaluations after negative opinions than after positive opinions. Instead of ignoring an out-group opinion, people differentiate from the out-group by reporting attitudes that make clear that they are different from the out-group. In this way, our research strongly contributes to the research that looks at group processes in persuasion attempts.

This also contributes to the research on differentiation tendencies (e.g., Jetten et al., 1998, 2004). Previous research mainly showed a differentiation effect on variables that have a more direct link to the out-group; by differentiating in terms of resource allocation, they really get more (or less) than the in-group does. By judging them in line with existing stereotypes, people communicate that the out-group is really different from the in-group. So, both of these previously used dependent variables to measure differentiation, have a direct link to the out-group. However, reporting an attitude that differs from the attitude given by the out-group, does not affect the out-group. Where previously used dependent variables are a way to



communicate that the out-group is really different from the in-group, reporting an attitude that clearly differs from the attitude of the out-group, is a more indirect way of differentiating the in-group from the out-group. A differentiation effect in reported attitude towards products seems to be a valuable contribution, especially because, in the current research design, respondents could evaluate the product themselves (they saw the picture of the painting).

The current research also contributes to previous research that examined how people use products to diverge from others or to signal a unique identity (Berger & Heath, 2007; Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005; White & Dahl, 2006, 2008). This research showed that people avoid products that are associated with groups they do not want be associated with, and that people sometimes use products to signal a unique identity. Our research showed that people also react to a simple categorization of people as out-group member, without any meaningful connotation attached to these group labels. In the current paradigm, the recommending agent was always a fellow student, and thus not completely different from the in-group. This might cause a need to clarify group boundaries, and the only opportunity to do so, was by expressing opinions that differed from the opinion of the out-group member. This indicates that a differentiation tendency is not bound to particular groups or brands, but can be generated by mere categorization. People can differentiate their opinions in order to express group boundaries, regardless of the type of product, or their perception of the out-group.

### ***Practical Implications***

We think that there are two important implications from this research; one related to the lack of differences in persuasiveness of the in-group member compared to the out-group member and another related to the finding that people evaluate a product more positive after a negative out-group recommendation than after a positive out-group recommendation. In line with Wilder and Shapiro (1984), Study 2 showed that an in-group only becomes salient (and thus influential) upon the clear presence of an out-group. When the

existence of an out-group is not very clear or salient, the other person is perceived more at an interpersonal level than at an intergroup level. It is noteworthy that we did not even find any in-group bias in Studies 1B and 1C. In both these studies, the categorization task (based on painting preferences or shape estimations) just preceded the recommendation. Especially in Study 1C, there was a clear reference to the existence of the other group; the respondent knew upfront that the test would show that he was either an overestimator or an underestimator. However, as our results seem to indicate, this was not a trigger for in-group bias. People only assimilated their opinion with the opinion of an (furthermore unknown) in-group member, when they had thought about the own group in comparison to the out-group.

This has clear and important practical implications. Our results suggest that having an in-group member recommending a product is not sufficient to lead to an assimilation towards the opinion advocated by the in-group, but that this only occurs when an intergroup context is salient (for example due to the presence of an out-group member). We want to emphasize that these implications hold for in-group members where people are not familiar with. Like the example we begun with, people who attend the same conference can see each other as in-group members, and when on holiday abroad, people suddenly see all people with the same nationality as in-group members, even though these people do not know each other at all (as was the case in the current research). When people do know each other, there are probably other factors that make these in-group members effective persuaders.

In, for example, advertising campaigns, the finding that an out-group member makes an intergroup context more salient could be a factor that is easy to implement, and this factor might have a positive impact on the effectiveness of persuasion appeals. This also extends the research of Brumbaugh (2002). She showed that nonsource cues in advertising can either enhance (when consistent with the source in the ad) or diminish (when inconsistent) the activation of a cultural model that was initially activated by the source cue. Our research showed that the presence of additional cues (out-group members in

our research) can highlight cues of the target source that were not salient (and thus not influential) before.

Furthermore, the results of the first three studies suggest that negative attitudes of other people can have a positive effect, when it is clear that the other person belongs to the out-group. This might be a strategy that could, for example, be implemented when there are negative rumors spread about a certain product. When they are not true, communicating that the people who are spreading these rumors are out-group members for the target group of this product, might be worth trying.

A nice illustration of the heightened in-group salience due to an out-group member, is the series of Gamma advertisements that has been shown on Dutch television. There is a prototypical “do-it-yourselfer” and his upper-class neighbor (named “Freekie”, which he always corrects because it is “Freek-Willem”), who are present in every commercial. The presence of the upper-class person (Freekie) in this advertisement probably makes all “do-it-yourselfers”, feel more affiliated with this “do-it-yourselfer” in the advertisement, than they would have felt without the upper-class neighbor. So, when the “do-it-yourselfer” is positive about Gamma, this probably has a more positive impact on the opinion of the prototypical “do-it-yourselfer” about the Gamma, than when the upper-class Freekie hadn’t been present in the ad.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

Word of mouth (WOM) is very effective in influencing product judgments and purchase intentions. This has led to an increasing interest from a marketing point of view into influencing WOM: increasing the likelihood that people recommend a specific product to others. One of the strategies marketers have started to use more often is implementing a reward program. There are various forms of reward programs, but the main idea behind all of them is that they provide an incentive for a recommendation. Previous academic research has examined whether providing a reward for a recommendation does lead to an increase in recommendations, and under which conditions these kinds of reward programs are most effective. This research showed that providing a reward can indeed increase referral likelihood, but only when consumers were already satisfied with the product (e.g., Wirtz & Chew, 2002), and that these recommendations are most effective in increasing recommendations directed towards weak ties (Ryu & Feick, 2007). However, research that provides more insight into how the target of the recommendation responds towards financially rewarded recommendations remained lacking. A reward may increase referral likelihood, but if the target of this recommendation does not trust these recommendations, then implementing a reward program in the end is still not successful.

The main purpose of this dissertation was to gain more insight into differences that exist between rewarded and non-rewarded recommendations, and in subsequently examining the impact of these differences on how people evaluate these recommendations. In the introduction of the dissertation, we identified three factors on which rewarded recommendations differ from non-rewarded recommendations. We argued that rewarded recommendations are relatively more often directed towards weak ties, are of questionable

trustworthiness, and introduce norms related to sales interactions into an interaction that normally occurs between friends. We subsequently examined how these factors influence the evaluations of both the recommendation agent, and the recommended product. Below, the main findings of this dissertation will be summarized, followed by a discussion of the implications and contributions, and some directions for future research.

### ***Summary of the Main Findings***

In Chapter 2, we examined whether evaluations of financially rewarded recommendations differ, depending on whether or not the target perceives this interaction from a ‘friendship’ or from a ‘sales’ perspective. Based on Fiske’s (1992) theory of social relationships, we argued that, within financially stimulated recommendations, both equality matching (EM; relationships based on an equal exchange of favors and goods, common relationships for weak tie recommendations) and market pricing (MP; relationships in which money serves as the main currency to express exchanges) relationship norms play an important role. We showed that norms of both relationships can be applied to these rewarded recommendation interactions. Whether EM or MP is the most salient norm, has a substantial impact on how people evaluate the recommending agent and on the intentions to comply with this recommendation. When MP norms were salient, people judged an agent who received a reward for a recommendation as more sincere (behavior motivated by financial rewards is normal and accepted within these relationships) but were less willing to comply with the recommendation (turning down sales offers is also accepted within these relationships). When EM norms were the most salient norms, we found exactly the opposite effects.

Furthermore, we gained new insight into the process by which these relationship norms influence judgments of interaction partners. We showed that these relationship norms can have an influence on the perceptions of interaction partners in a very efficient manner, requiring very little cognitive capacity and occurring outside the participants’ awareness. This implies that, when there are no clear and established relationship norms yet, very subtle cues

can already influence which relationship norm is the most salient norm during an interaction. Another way of introducing the financial reward into the interaction, is by disclosing this underlying motive. We showed that disclosing a financial motive can lead to more positive agent evaluations. However, this effect was limited to conditions where respondents could devote full attention to the target interaction. In other words, whereas the influence of relationship norms is efficient, incorporating disclosures in the judgment seems to require effort and cognitive capacity. This implies that, depending on the amount of available attention of the recommendation target, it can be more effective to be clear about the reward, or to introduce more subtle cues in the interaction which activate the sales aspect of the interaction.

In Chapter 3, we examined the impact of source trustworthiness (based on facial characteristics), in interaction with these relationship norms (equality matching and market pricing). As we discussed above, people might question the trustworthiness of an agent whose recommendation is driven by a financial reward. We showed that, when an EM relationship norm was salient, people were less positive about a source who recommends a product for a reward when they originally perceived this source as trustworthy, than when they did not perceive this source as trustworthy. We argued that a trustworthy first impression leads to positive/trustworthy expectations with regard to the behavior of this person. Finding out that this person recommends something in order to obtain a financial gain is not in line with these expectations (that exist within EM relationships) and thus leads to less favorable evaluations of the person. When this person had an untrustworthy appearance, the reward came less as a (unpleasant) surprise and this person was thus evaluated more positive than the person who made the trustworthy first impression. Within MP relationships, behavior driven by financial motives is normal, expected and not perceived as untrustworthy behavior (contrary to EM relationships). In line with this reasoning, although the means indicate a positive effect, source trustworthiness did not have a significant effect on source evaluations when MP was the salient relationship norm. Thus, in line with Chapter 2, Chapter 3

showed that a financial reward induces a conflict within EM relationships, and a trustworthy source reinforces this effect.

Furthermore, this chapter also sheds light on the context dependency of the impact of facial trustworthiness. Respondents saw either a trustworthy or an untrustworthy face, based on subtly manipulated differences (i.e., the shape of the lips and the shape of the eyes, DePaulo et al., 2003). Previous research on facial cues showed that people infer trustworthiness very quickly (within 100 ms, Willis & Todorov, 2006), and that they do not substantially change these judgments after longer exposure times to these faces. In our studies however, we showed that the context in which people encounter these faces is of crucial importance for how these facial cues impact the evaluations of the person. Characteristics that are in general positively valued, surprisingly, can also have a negative impact on the final evaluations.

A difference between the findings in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 is that the relationship norms had a significant impact only when the capacity was impaired in Chapter 2, whereas in Chapter 3 (Study 2), relationship norms had an effect on evaluations irrespective of available cognitive capacity. We can only speculate on this difference. We think that this might be explained by the interaction between the activated relationship frame and the presence of the face in Chapter 3. In our studies in Chapter 3, the relationship norm is already activated and the (un)trustworthy face forms an immediate impression, so the link between both is established before reading the target scenario. This link might be stronger and have more influence than only the relationship norm we activated in Chapter 2. Because the link between relationship norm and face is already established, this is more difficult to become overruled by a target scenario, whereas with only a relationship activation this is apparently easily overruled.

Finally, in Chapter 4, we examined a factor that is more indirectly related to rewarded recommendations. As previous research showed (Ryu & Feick, 2007), rewarded recommendations are relatively more often directed towards weak ties instead of strong ties. This makes it important to have more insight into different characteristics of weak ties that might impact recommendations.

An important and quickly inferred characteristic is group membership (Tajfel, 1982). People easily categorize others as belonging to the own group (in-group) or belonging to another group (out-group). This mere categorization has a strong impact on a huge variety of behaviors, and on how we approach and evaluate others. People with whom you do not have a (strong) relationship (i.e., weak ties) can belong to both the in-group (e.g. fellow business students) or to the out-group (e.g. psychology students). Whether someone belongs to the in-group or the out-group may have a lot of impact on the effectiveness of a recommendation (following an advise from someone of the own group seems for example more likely than following the advise from someone who belongs to another group). We investigated how people evaluate a product after either a positive or a negative recommendation from an in-group versus an out-group member. We examined the ‘differentiation tendency’ hypothesis (see Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004); we argued and showed that people responded towards a persuasion attempt from an out-group member by reporting attitudes that reflected the opposite from the attitude of the out-group member. That is, when the out-group member was positive about a product, respondents were less positive about this product than when the out-group member was negative about this product. This demonstrated that the opinion of out-group members is not irrelevant to us, but that recommendations from out-group members can have an important influence on our opinions. Furthermore, in line with previous research (Wilder & Shapiro, 1984) that showed that out-group cues can also make the in-group more salient, we showed that recommendations from in-group members only had an impact on attitudes when respondents were confronted with out-group members just before. When respondents thought about their in-group in comparison to the out-group, they assimilated their own attitudes in the direction of the attitude displayed by the in-group member. Without any out-group cues, a fellow in-group member is probably perceived as a stranger on a more interpersonal level, instead of as someone who shares a group membership with you, and consequently less persuasive (which is also in line with previous findings that weak ties are generally not very persuasive). Chapter 4 thus showed that group membership, in



combination with the salience of this group membership, is of important influence on the impact of a recommendation on own attitudes.

The current dissertation provides both scientifically and practically relevant insights into relationship norms, the impact of facial characteristics, social categorization, and word of mouth. Below, I will discuss the scientific and practical contributions.

### ***Scientific Contributions***

This dissertation contributes to the scientific literature in various ways. We add to the relationship norm theory by showing that relationship norms have an (efficient) impact on the perceptions and evaluations of interaction partners. The relationship norm theory as yet predominantly examined the impact of relationship norms as part of a target interaction (by giving respondents a scenario in which it was explicitly mentioned what the relationship was). Our research showed that these norms can be activated with very subtle cues, which are presented to the respondent as completely separate from the target interaction. Thereby, the current dissertation provides more in-depth insights into the nature and operation of relationship norms, and shows the highly efficient nature of the norm influence. This implies that, for interactions that occur between relative strangers (or people who do not have a clearly established relationship yet), very subtle cues that are present in the environment can activate a certain relationship frame which subsequently can have an extensive impact on how the interaction partner and his or her behavior is interpreted and evaluated. It also shows the important impact of relationship norms on the interpretation of behavior of the interaction partner; people can judge the exact same behaviors completely differently, depending on the relationship norm that is most salient during that interaction. Since interactions between people in which no relationship norm at all is activated are very rare or even absent (Fiske, 1992), it is important to take relationship norms into account when investigating person perceptions and judgments.

Furthermore, we contributed to the norm theory in general. Previous research showed that subtly activated environmental norms can influence the

behavior of people (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Cialdini, 2003). We add to this research by showing that norms can also influence the perception, evaluation and interpretation of the behaviors of interaction partners, and are thus not limited to how people behave themselves, but can also serve as a mindset through which people view the world around them.

We also showed that the relationship norm most salient during an interaction can be an important moderator of the impact of facial cues on person judgments. Within one type of relationship (i.e., equality matching), certain characteristics that people infer from facial cues (trustworthiness) are more important with regard to evaluating certain behaviors (rewarded recommendation), than in other types of relationships (such as market pricing). This has important implications for research on facial characteristics. Research in this area has before mainly focused on the inference of emotions and personality from facial characteristics (see Zebrowitz, 2006 for an overview), and on the speed and accuracy with which people infer these characteristics (Willis & Todorov, 2006). Our research showed that the context (in this case a salient relationship norm) in which we encounter someone, can also be of crucial importance for the final evaluations. When a face expresses a characteristic that does not match with the actual behavior performed by someone within a specific relationship frame, an otherwise positively valenced characteristic can cause more negative evaluations than if the facial characteristic was less positive. This shows that facial characteristics are indeed very important when encountering people, but characteristics inferred from faces can also backfire on final evaluations when the behavior is not in line with the characteristic inferred from the face.

This dissertation also contributes to the research on social categorization effects on persuasion. Previous research showed that in-group persuasion attempts have more impact on attitudes, and showed that persuasion attempts from in-group members can lead to more systematic message processing (Van Knippenberg, 1999). We wanted to gain more insight into the persuasiveness of out-group members. We showed that people report a more positive attitude after a negative out-group recommendation than after both a positive out-group

recommendation and after a negative in-group recommendation. This indicates that people have a tendency to differentiate their own attitude away from the attitude of an out-group member. This shows new insights in the impact of persuasion attempts from out-group members and implies that recommendations can lead to attitudes that are opposite of the ones promoted in the persuasion attempt. Furthermore, previous research showed that being confronted with out-group members also makes in-group membership salient (Wilder & Shapiro, 1984), and we added to this research by showing that a recommendation from an in-group member is only effective when an intergroup context was salient (i.e., after respondents thought about the own group in relation to the out-group), and does not have any significant persuasive influence when the intergroup context is not salient.

What does this dissertation learn us about WOM? In the first place, as we discussed before, previous research (Ryu & Feick, 2007) showed that rewarded recommendations are mostly effective in increasing recommendations directed towards weak ties. This dissertation provided more in-depth insights in weak-tie recommendations. With weak-tie recommendations, when a reward plays a role in the interaction, there might be confusion about the exact nature of the interaction; to what extent is the interaction based on friendship versus sales norms? We gained more insight into the impact of these different norms on the evaluation of both the recommendation agent and the product. We showed that both these relationship norms can be applied to this rewarded interaction. Sales norms lead to both a more positive evaluation of the recommendation agent, and to a lower compliance likelihood, compared to friendship norms. This implies that both norms have their own, unique, positive and negative effects, and the advantage of weak tie recommendations is that it is relatively easy to apply different norms to an interaction, since there is no clear established relationship between these people yet. As we showed with the priming procedure used to activate these relationship norms, very subtle cues can be sufficient to activate different relationship norms. This creates the opportunity to influence the type of relationship norm people might apply to an interaction and subsequently to direct the interpretation of the interaction. Especially for

relatively ambiguous interactions between weak ties (such as rewarded recommendations), the presence of certain subtle cues can be manipulated in order to guide the interaction in the direction that suits with the goals someone has during that interaction (i.e., establishing a relationship or persuading the interaction partner).

We also examined the impact of disclosing the financial reward on the evaluation of the recommendation agent and compliance intention. We showed that a disclosure can have a beneficial effect on agent evaluations, but only when the target of this recommendation is really able to process this information (i.e., has a lot of cognitive capacity available to devote to the target interaction). It requires capacity to correct the first impression ('someone wants to profit from me') for the additional disclosure information (see Gilbert et al., 1988). This implies that disclosure effects are relatively limited, since people in daily life do not often have a lot of attention to spend to one interaction (cf., Dijksterhuis, Smith, Van Baaren, & Wigboldus, 2005). Another factor that has relatively limited, and even unexpected negative effects, is trustworthiness of the source. Rather than leading to more favorable agent evaluations, a source with a trustworthy appearance can be evaluated more negatively than an untrustworthy source, when recommending a product for a financial reward. This shows that characteristics that normally have a positive effect on agent evaluations, can backfire when the behavior is not in line with what was expected.

Furthermore, we gained more insight into the impact of social categorization on weak tie recommendations. We showed that recommendations from out-group members can lead to a differentiation tendency; people report attitudes that are clearly different from the attitude of the out-group member. In-group members only have an impact on attitudes when an intergroup context is made salient (e.g., when people thought about their own group relative to another group just before), because this highlights that the recommendation comes from a fellow group member instead of from a stranger (which is the recommendation agent when this person is perceived on a more interpersonal level). This indicates that, even when people do not know

another person, group membership (e.g., whether he or she works for the same company or for a different one) can have important implications for the impact of a recommendation from this person. Social categorization thus is an important factor to take into account when weak ties are important for WOM recommendations.

To summarize, with this dissertation we both gained more insight into factors that influence the effectiveness of recommendations from weak tie sources and rewarded recommendations, and we gained more insight into the nature and operation of the constructs (relationship norms, trustworthiness inferred from faces and social categorization) that we identified as important factors with regard to (rewarded) recommendations from weak ties. In general, these results seem to imply that a reward as an underlying motivator leads to less favorable agent evaluations when it comes as a total surprise, but not when there were some signals that pointed at the reward before (such as a sales relationship norm, an untrustworthy impression, or a disclosure). At the same time, other relationship cues (such as sales norms and out-group membership) can have unexpected negative effects on product evaluations and purchase intentions.

### ***Limitations and Directions for Future Research***

A first limitation of the current dissertation is its focus on the impact of *financial* rewards. As indicated before, a reward can take various forms, like receiving a gift, a bonus or gift vouchers. These other types of rewards are very interesting to take into account in future research. Especially when investigating the impact of market pricing versus equality matching norms, these different reward types may be relevant. These other types of rewards lack the clear MP aspect that is inherent to financial rewards, and may entail less of a violation of equality matching relationship norms. This could imply that the negative effects of the norm violation on agent evaluations within equality matching are limited to situations in which a financial reward is provided, and do not apply to situations in which other types of rewards are provided. On the other hand, one could also argue that the recommendation is still (partly)

stimulated by ulterior motives, which does not fit with the equality matching frame and would imply that also a gift as reward is not appreciated and leads to less favorable agent evaluations. Market pricing relationship norms may therefore be less applicable to interactions where other kinds of rewards are used to stimulate a referral.

A second and related limitation is the type of reward program that has been examined in this dissertation. Reward programs can take various forms; a customer can get a reward for providing a company with contact details of fellow possibly interested customers, a customer can get a reward for making a successful recommendation (i.e., the recommendation target actually becomes a customer himself), both referring customer and the referral target can get a reward, and probably there are other types of programs as well. In this dissertation, only the program where the recommending customer receives a reward after a successful recommendation has been examined. These ‘reward me’ programs seem to be relatively often implemented (and also received relatively the most scientific interest, e.g., Biyalogorsky et al., 2001; Wirtz & Chew, 2002), which makes examining ‘reward me’ programs from a target point of view the most relevant one. Furthermore, such “reward me” programs are the most interesting programs for examining the impact of relationship norms, and other agent characteristics, since they involve a direct interaction between the recommendation agent and target.

Third, in the current dissertation, the difference in agent evaluation after a rewarded versus a non-rewarded recommendation has not been directly compared. This implies that no conclusions about the impact of a rewarded recommendation in comparison to a non-rewarded recommendation on agent evaluations can be drawn. However, comparing the impact of a reward versus no reward, is relatively more interesting from the perspective of the recommendation agent than from the perspective of the target. From an agent perspective, it is very relevant to know whether a reward leads to more recommendations than no reward (cf., Ryu & Feick, 2007). Given that a reward leads to more (weak tie) recommendations, it is important to investigate which factors influence the effectiveness of rewarded recommendations (from

a recommendation target perspective). Obtaining more knowledge about ‘weak tie’ referrals in general seemed to be an essential contribution in this respect.

Fourth, in all the reported experiments, the recommendation agent was male<sup>14</sup>. We did start with an experiment with a female agent, but reactions of respondents were that they found it strange, and even awkward, to be approached by a female. Especially male respondents immediately thought that she was desperately looking for a date, and did not even perceive these interactions as word-of-mouth recommendations. Therefore, we decided to continue with only male recommendation agents. However, this implies that we cannot draw any sound conclusions with regard to female agents.

A fifth limitation of this dissertation pertains to the experimental methodology used. This methodology allowed us to obtain insight into the underlying process and the exact effects of different weak tie recommendations that would probably have been impossible with other methodologies. For example, in daily life, people will probably give more recommendations towards (strong tie) in-group members than towards out-group members. This will result in a positive effect of positive recommendations, and a negative effect of negative recommendations. However, the differentiation effect in response to out-group recommendations would not have to become clear, whereas this provides important insights into the impact of different weak tie sources, and furthermore seems to have important practical implications (as are discussed above). Furthermore, in more complex settings, it would not have been possible to examine the impact of relationship norms in the way that has been done in Chapter 2. Thus, the added value of using an experimental methodology lies mainly in obtaining more insight into the underlying nature of the impact of different independent variables, without any noise from other interfering factors. This goes at the expenses of the external validity of the results. This of course implies another suggestion for future research, namely replicating the results with different types of methodologies.

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<sup>14</sup> Please note that we tested for gender effects in all experiments, but did not find consistent, significant differences due to the gender of the respondents.

### ***Practical Implications***

Besides contributing to the scientific knowledge, this dissertation has several practical implications. An important practical implication is the increase in persuasiveness of in-group members in an intergroup context compared to an in-group context. A recommendation from an in-group member did not have any impact on the attitudes of the target, until the target was reminded of the existence of an out-group. Suddenly this other person was perceived on a group level (as an in-group member) instead of on an interpersonal level, and this led to an increase in persuasiveness of his recommendation. This result suggests that the presence of other people during a persuasion attempt can have a lot of impact on the effectiveness of the persuasion attempt. The presence of other people who belong to the out-group, can highlight that a specific person belongs to your in-group, which subsequently has a positive effect on the persuasiveness of a recommendation. This could also be applied in advertising campaigns. For example, the fact that a fellow woman is recommending a product might become much more prevalent when there are also males present in this advertisement, and this might make her persuasion attempt targeted at females more effective.

Another important practical implication from Chapter 4 is the differentiation effect that recommendations from out-group members have. Chapter 4 suggests that there are situations where recommendations can have a negative impact instead of the aimed positive effect, and vice versa. This implies that one should carefully consider who will be the target of a recommendation. Although it would be an unorthodox marketing strategy, one implication of the results in chapter 4 would be that negative word of mouth can have some positive side effects when these negative recommendations reach people who belong to the out-group. Imagine for example a college cafeteria that is shared by both psychology and business administration students, and a group of business administration students is discussing their latest very negative experiences in a new bar. Depending on the exact nature of their negative experiences, this could be a signal towards the group of psychology students that is sitting next to them, to actually try this bar. Thus,



even though the overall effect of negative WOM is not very likely to become positive, there seem to be situations in which negative recommendations can have positive effects as well. Especially in situations in which a company finds out that there is negative WOM spread about a product, communicating to the target population of the product that the negative WOM mainly circulates among out-group members, could be a strategy to dampen the negative impact.

This dissertation also has practical implications with regard to rewarded WOM. Applying both friendship (equality matching) and sales (market pricing) relationship norms to rewarded recommendation interactions, can have positive effects. The equality matching norms led to a higher compliance intention, whereas the market pricing norms led to a higher perceived sincerity. However, with regard to a more long term perspective, the market pricing norms might be more beneficial. In the end, people are probably more likely to continue to interact with someone who they see as sincere. As Chapter 2 and 3 showed, when the interaction is between people who do not yet have an established relationship, it requires only subtle cues to manipulate the most salient relationship norm. These cues do not even have to be a direct part of the interaction, but can, for example, be due to the clothing style of the interaction partner. Think about a stranger in a clothing store with or without coat; the first one is most likely perceived as a fellow customer, the second one as the salesperson.

Furthermore, disclosing the reward seems to be recommendable. Even though disclosing the reward was only beneficial when respondents could devote full attention to the target interaction, disclosing never had a negative effect on agent evaluations or compliance intentions and can thus be seen as a recommendable strategy. This implies that there does not seem to be a need for companies to object to required disclosures (an issue that has raised considerable amounts of debate, see Creamer, 2005; Shin, 2006). Rather than harming the effectiveness of the recommendation, these kinds of disclosures seem to have a positive effect. People know exactly what drives the behavior, and thus do not become disappointed, but they still get information from a personal source, who is enthusiastic about the product, and it is likely to have

experience with the product. This recommendation thus contains part of the positive factors of non-rewarded WOM. Previous research has shown that rewarding a recommendation can lead to an increase in (intentions to) recommendations, but only when people were already satisfied or happy with the product (Biyalogorsky, Gerstner, & Libai, 2001; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). This implies that, even when a reward is an additional motivator, people are not very likely to talk about products when they are not happy or satisfied with the product. This is probably also assumed by the target of the recommendation, which explains why s/he is not very negative about the recommendation or recommendation agent and that it is appreciated that the financial motive becomes clear.

The fact that rewarding a customer for a recommendation only leads to an increase in recommendations when the recommending customer was already satisfied with the product, also speaks against moral objections that can be raised in response to rewarding recommendations. Providing rewards for recommendations is not likely to turn customers into salespersons who recommend just about any product. Rather, rewards provide an additional motivator that encourages satisfied customers to share their positive experiences with others.

### ***Conclusions***

Rewarding customers for recommending a product becomes increasingly more common practice, and does seem to be an additional motivator for customers to recommend a product to others. This makes it very important to understand how the targets of these recommendations respond to such recommendations, and which factors influence the effectiveness of these recommendations. In the current dissertation, we shed light on this question. Previous research showed that rewarded recommendations are relatively often directed towards weak ties (Ryu & Feick, 2007). We identified relationship norms (either sales or friendship norms), agent trustworthiness, and group membership as important characteristics of weak ties, and showed that they influence the effectiveness of (rewarded) recommendations. We used theories

on relationship norms and norm activation to get more insight into the impact of equality matching and market pricing relationship norms on the evaluation of rewarded recommendations. Furthermore, we showed important boundary effects of positively valued facial characteristics (i.e., trustworthiness); when behavior does not match with these characteristics, they lead to less instead of more favorable evaluations. Finally, we examined the impact of social categorization on the impact of (positive or negative) recommendations, and showed that people differentiate from out-group members.

Through this dissertation, we have gained more insight into factors related to recommendations between weak ties, and in the impact of rewarded recommendations on agent and product evaluations. Previous research showed that a reward only increases referral likelihood for people who are satisfied with the product or service. In addition to this research, we showed that, when a financial reward is an underlying motive for a recommendation, the recommending agent benefits from revealing this motive, instead of hiding it. On a more general level, being clear about these motives instead of hiding them can be seen as an act out of friendship. This implies that, when money is a reason to talk, friendship shouldn't stay silent.

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## Samenvatting

Mond-tot-mond communicatie is sinds jaar en dag een zeer belangrijke bron van informatie voor consumenten. In vergelijking met andere vormen van communicatie zoals reclame, heeft mond-tot-mond communicatie relatief veel invloed op de beslissingen van consumenten. De persoonlijke ervaringen van anderen met een product of dienst zijn vaak erg informatief en betrouwbaar. Omdat mond-tot-mond communicatie zoveel invloed heeft op de beslissingen van consumenten, zijn ook marketeers geïnteresseerd in mond-tot-mond communicatie. Recent is er vanuit een marketing perspectief met name interesse in de mogelijkheden die er zijn om consumenten te stimuleren om over een product of dienst te praten. Eén van de manieren die door marketeers wordt gebruikt om consumenten te stimuleren om anderen een bepaald product aan te raden, is consumenten hiervoor te belonen. Deze beloning kan bijvoorbeeld zijn in de vorm van een cadeautje, een productkorting, of een financiële beloning (ook wel word-of-mouth marketing genoemd). Voorbeelden hiervan zijn het krijgen van korting op een tijdschrift abonnement wanneer je een nieuwe abonnee aanbrengt, het krijgen van een dinerbon voor het aanbevelen van een hypotheek aan anderen, en het krijgen van korting op een ooglasers behandeling voor zowel de aanbeveler als de nieuwe klant. Eerder onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat het belonen van aanbevelingen inderdaad een positieve invloed heeft op de intentie van mensen om een product aan te bevelen. Dit geldt echter alleen wanneer men tevreden is over het product. Indien men niet tevreden is, zal een beloning geen effect hebben op de neiging van mensen om dit product aan te bevelen.

Wat echter nog niet bekend is, is hoe de ontvanger van dergelijke beloonde aanbevelingen reageert op deze aanbevelingen. Zijn deze aanbevelingen net zo effectief als niet beloonde aanbevelingen, of wordt er anders tegen deze aanbevelingen aangekeken? Om een goed beeld te krijgen van de effectiviteit van het belonen van aanbevelingen, is het van belang om te weten hoe mensen reageren op een aanbeveling die beloond wordt. Immers, het belonen van aanbevelingen kan leiden tot een toename in aanbevelingen, maar als deze

aanbevelingen niet door de ontvanger gewaardeerd worden, dan is het belonen uiteindelijk niet effectief.

In dit proefschrift wordt beargumenteerd dat een beloonde aanbeveling op belangrijke punten verschilt van niet beloonde aanbevelingen. In de eerste plaats is de grote mate van effectiviteit van mond-tot-mond communicatie voor een deel te danken aan het feit dat er geen marketingbelang ten grondslag ligt aan deze aanbeveling. Wanneer de aanbeveling echter beloond wordt, dan wordt er een marketingcomponent geïntroduceerd in deze interactie. Dit zorgt ervoor dat er in een persoonlijke interactie tussen consumenten die voorheen puur op vriendschapsprincipes was gebaseerd, nu ook aspecten van een verkooprelatie een rol gaan spelen.

Als tweede komt de betrouwbaarheid van de aanbeveling en de aanbeveler ter discussie staan wanneer er een beloning ten grondslag ligt aan de aanbeveling. Het is onduidelijk voor de ontvanger van de aanbeveling in hoeverre de beloning een rol speelt bij het doen van de aanbeveling, en in hoeverre de aanbeveling ook had plaatsgevonden zonder de beloning. Waar men er voorheen vanuit kon gaan dat de aanbeveling oprecht gemeend was, kan men nu twijfelen aan de betrouwbaarheid van deze informatie.

Een derde aspect dat een rol speelt bij beloonde aanbevelingen, is de sterkte van de relatie tussen mensen tussen wie deze aanbevelingen plaatsvinden. Eerder onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat beloonde aanbevelingen relatief vaker gericht worden aan mensen met wie we een minder intensieve relatie hebben; dus collega's en kennissen in plaats van goede vrienden en familie. Het is daarom van belang om meer inzicht te krijgen in factoren die een rol spelen bij aanbevelingen die plaatsvinden tussen mensen die een minder intensieve relatie met elkaar hebben.

In dit proefschrift wordt de effectiviteit van beloonde aanbevelingen onderzocht vanuit het perspectief van de ontvanger. In hoofdstuk 2 wordt de invloed van het verkoopaspect dat in een beloonde aanbeveling een rol speelt, onderzocht. Fiske's theorie over interpersoonlijke relaties gaat ervan uit dat mensen onderling verschillende typen relaties met elkaar kunnen hebben, waarbinnen verschillende gedragsnormen gelden. Zo is het normaal dat een

werknemer opdrachten van zijn baas uitvoert (een relatie op basis van autoriteit, ook wel authority ranking genoemd), terwijl collega's onderling elkaar eerder wederzijdse diensten verlenen (een relatie op basis van gelijkheid, ook wel 'Equality Matching' genoemd). Op basis van deze theorie argumenteren we dat er binnen verkooprelaties (ook wel 'Market Pricing' relaties genoemd) andere normen gelden over welk gedrag gepast en geaccepteerd is, dan binnen vriendschapsrelaties (hiermee bedoelen we relaties waarin gelijkheid belangrijk is, de eerder genoemde 'Equality Matching' relaties). Zo is het binnen verkooprelaties geaccepteerd en gepast om producten aan te bevelen in ruil voor een financiële beloning, iets wat binnen vriendschapsrelaties niet het geval is. Omgekeerd is het binnen vriendschapsrelaties normaal om bijvoorbeeld dingen te ruilen of uit te lenen, terwijl een verkoopster raar op zou kijken als ze bij de kassa een oude trui aangeboden krijgt in ruil voor de nieuwe, in plaats van het bedrag dat op het prijskaartje staat. Binnen vriendschapsrelaties staan termen als 'gelijkheid' en 'wederkerigheid' centraal, terwijl een centraal aspect van verkooprelaties is dat de waarde van goederen en diensten (en ook arbeid) in geldelijke termen wordt uitgedrukt.

De normen die horen bij deze verschillende relaties, bepalen hoe we gedrag van onze interactiepartners waarnemen en beoordelen. We argumenteren dat beide relatietypes van toepassing zijn op beloonde aanbevelingen. Immers, een mond-tot-mond aanbeveling vindt typisch plaats tussen vrienden of kennissen, terwijl het ontvangen van een beloning voor een aanbeveling een kenmerkend aspect voor verkooprelaties is. Welke relatie echter het meest saillant is, wordt verondersteld van grote invloed te zijn op de evaluatie van zowel de beloonde aanbeveling als de aanbeveler. In een serie van experimenten laten we zien dat de normen die bij deze verschillende relaties horen, relatief gemakkelijk saillant te maken zijn (door mensen een woordzoeker op te laten lossen waarin woorden voorkwamen die typerend zijn voor één van beide relaties). Vervolgens werd hen gevraagd een interactie te beoordelen waarin ze een tijdschrift werd aangeraden. Achteraf bleek dat de aanbeveler een beloning kreeg voor deze aanbeveling. Beide normen bleken van toepassing te kunnen



zijn op beloonde aanbevelingen. Wanneer men de normen die gelden binnen verkooprelaties toepast op een financieel beloonde aanbeveling, vindt men de aanbeveler weliswaar oprechter, maar men is tegelijkertijd minder geneigd om op de aanbeveling in te gaan, dan wanneer men de normen van een vriendschapsrelatie toepast. Dit is in lijn met de gedragsnormen die gelden binnen de verschillende relaties; een aanbeveling in ruil voor een financiële beloning is normaal en geaccepteerd binnen verkooprelaties en niet binnen vriendschapsrelaties. Tegelijkertijd is het ook veel gebruikelijker om een aanbod van een verkoper af te slaan dan om een aanbod van een vriend af te slaan.

In een vervolgstudie onderzoeken we hoe mensen beloonde aanbevelingen evalueren, wanneer de aanbeveler tijdens het doen van de aanbeveling, zelf aangeeft dat hij een beloning ontvangt voor het doen van deze aanbeveling. Het blijkt dat het onthullen van deze beloning maar van beperkt belang is; alleen wanneer de ontvanger zijn volledige aandacht kon besteden aan de aanbeveling, was er een positief effect van het onthullen van de beloning op de beoordeling van de aanbeveler. Wanneer de aandacht slechts beperkt was, was er geen verschil in beoordeling als gevolg van het al dan niet onthullen van de beloning. Hieruit blijkt dat het onthullen van een beloning maar beperkte invloed heeft op de evaluatie van de aanbeveling, en dat die invloed bovendien positief is. Het idee dat het onthullen van deze beloning een negatief effect zal hebben (wat door marketeers wel eens als bezwaar wordt aangedragen tegen het verplichten van het onthullen van de beloning), lijkt hiermee te zijn verworpen.

In hoofdstuk 3 onderzoeken we vervolgens de invloed van de betrouwbaarheid van de aanbeveler in combinatie met bovengenoemde relatiënormen, op de evaluatie van de aanbeveler. We dragen hiermee zowel bij aan de bestaande kennis over mond-tot-mond communicatie en bovengenoemde relatie theorie, als ook aan onderzoek naar de invloed van gezichtskenmerken op persoonsevaluaties. De betrouwbaarheid wordt gemanipuleerd door een foto te tonen van het gezicht van de aanbeveler. Deze gezichten zijn artificieel, en verschillen alleen in de mate van betrouwbaarheid.

We argumenteren dat de waargenomen betrouwbaarheid van de aanbeveler alleen van invloed is op de evaluatie van de aanbeveler binnen vriendschapsrelaties en niet binnen verkooprelaties. Binnen verkooprelaties is een financiële beloning verwacht en geaccepteerd, en de waargenomen betrouwbaarheid geeft dus weinig relevante informatie met betrekking tot dit specifieke gedrag. Binnen vriendschapsrelaties is de financiële beloning echter niet verwacht. Als de aanbeveler een betrouwbare uitstraling heeft, dan is het feit dat die persoon een financiële beloning krijgt onverwachter en een grotere tegenvaller, dan wanneer de aanbeveler op het eerste gezicht al onbetrouwbaar overkwam. In een aantal experimenten wordt deze hypothese bevestigd. De resultaten laten de paradoxale bevinding zien dat, wanneer in mond-tot-mond communicatie een aanbeveling financieel beloond wordt, een betrouwbaar uitzijnde aanbeveler uiteindelijk minder positief wordt beoordeeld dan een onbetrouwbaar uitzijnde aanbeveler. Een betrouwbaar uiterlijk heeft dus niet altijd een positief effect, maar kan ook belangrijke nadelen met zich meebrengen.

In hoofdstuk 4 onderzoeken we factoren die een rol spelen bij aanbevelingen tussen mensen die elkaar niet goed kennen (een minder intense relatie hebben, zogenaamde ‘weak ties’). Eerder onderzoek liet zien dat deze groep bij uitstek de groep is waarbinnen beloonde aanbevelingen plaatsvinden. Echter, omdat mensen elkaar niet (goed) kennen, kunnen er andere factoren van invloed zijn op de effectiviteit van deze aanbevelingen dan bij aanbevelingen tussen mensen die elkaar wel goed kennen. Een belangrijk onderscheid dat vaak onmiddellijk duidelijk wordt tussen mensen die elkaar niet (goed) kennen, is of ze tot dezelfde of tot een andere groep behoren (tot de ‘in-group’ of tot de ‘out-group’). Leeftijd en geslacht, maar ook bijvoorbeeld kledingstijl en accent, maken vaak onmiddellijk duidelijk of mensen tot dezelfde of tot andere groepen behoren. In hoofdstuk 4 onderzoeken wij de invloed van deze sociale categorisatie op de effectiviteit van aanbevelingen tussen mensen die een weinig intensieve relatie met elkaar hebben. We onderzoeken derhalve hoe effectief aanbevelingen van buitenstaanders zijn. Het blijkt dat mensen reageren op aanbevelingen van mensen die niet tot de

eigen groep behoren, door er zelf attitudes op na te gaan houden die tegenstrijdig zijn aan de mening die verkondigd was in de aanbeveling. Dit leidt ertoe dat het horen van een positieve opinie afkomstig van iemand die tot een andere groep behoort, leidt tot een negatievere attitude, dan een negatieve opinie afkomstig van dezelfde persoon. Het blijkt dat dit effect onafhankelijk is van welke categorisatie er wordt gebruikt, en wordt dus niet gedreven door een behoefte om specifieke groepen te vermijden (zogenoemde dissociatieve groepen, denk hierbij bijvoorbeeld aan een puber die pertinent niet met de ouders geassocieerd wil worden). Het effect lijkt eerder gedreven te worden door een neiging om te laten zien dat men anders is dan iedere willekeurige ander die niet tot de eigen groep behoort. Opmerkelijk is tevens dat een positieve of negatieve aanbeveling van een eigen groepslid veel minder effect dan een aanbeveling van een buitenstaander. We beargumenteren dat het pas duidelijk wordt dat een onbekende tot dezelfde groep behoort, wanneer men ook met andere groepen geconfronteerd wordt. Indien dit niet gebeurt, zal deze andere persoon eerder op een inter-persoonlijk dan op een inter-groep niveau worden gezien. Wanneer je in Nederland in de auto rijdt, zijn alle andere auto's om je heen in de eerste plaats onbekenden. Als je echter in het buitenland in auto rijdt, zul je een andere auto met een Nederlands kenteken opeens zien als een landgenoot (iemand die tot de eigen groep behoort, in plaats van een willekeurige vreemde). Mensen zijn minder geneigd om een aanbeveling van een willekeurige onbekende op te volgen, dan van iemand met wie ze een groepslidmaatschap delen. Met dit onderzoek dragen we bij aan de kennis over de invloed van sociale categorisatie op beïnvloeding, door meer inzicht te verschaffen in hoe mensen reageren op aanbevelingen van buitenstaanders.

Op basis van de bevindingen in dit proefschrift kan een aantal belangrijke conclusies met betrekking tot (beloonde) mond-tot-mond communicatie worden getrokken. In de eerste plaats blijkt dat de introductie van een verkoopaspect in de relatie (bijvoorbeeld doordat een aanbeveling beloond wordt), niet zonder meer een negatief effect op de aanbeveling heeft. Het saillant maken van normen die gelden binnen verkooprelaties, heeft een

positieve invloed op de beoordeling van de aanbeveler. Een minder positief effect is echter wel dat men tevens minder geneigd is om deze aanbeveling op te volgen. Op de langere termijn lijkt het echter van groter belang dat men positief is over de aanbeveler (wat de kans op interacties in de toekomst doet toenemen) dan dat men op de korte termijn meer geneigd is om op de aanbeveling in te gaan. Verder blijkt ook uit dit proefschrift dat betrouwbaarheid binnen vriendschapsrelaties een grotere rol speelt dan binnen verkooprelaties, wanneer het gaat om beloonde aanbevelingen. Dit heeft tot gevolg dat een betrouwbaar uitziende persoon minder positief kan worden geëvalueerd dan een onbetrouwbaar uitziende persoon, wanneer een financiële beloning ten grondslag ligt aan de aanbeveling. Dit onderzoek duidt erop dat het van belang is dat een beloning voor een aanbeveling niet als donderslag bij heldere hemel komt, maar dat het een positieve invloed heeft op de evaluatie van de aanbeveler, wanneer men op de één of andere wijze is voorbereid op de aanwezigheid van de beloning. Tevens blijkt uit dit proefschrift dat sociale categorisatie een belangrijke invloed heeft op de effectiviteit van aanbevelingen tussen mensen die een weinig intensieve relatie met elkaar hebben.

De belangrijkste marketing aanbeveling die gedaan kan worden op basis van dit proefschrift, is dat het aan te raden is om, wanneer een aanbeveling beloond wordt, te zorgen dat deze beloning niet totaal onverwachts komt voor de ontvanger van deze aanbeveling. Dit is bijvoorbeeld het geval wanneer duidelijk is dat de interactie (deels) gebaseerd is op normen die gelden binnen verkooprelaties, en wanneer men de aanbeveler niet volledig vertrouwt. Dit heeft in ieder geval een positief effect op de beoordeling van de aanbeveler, wat op de lange termijn kan leiden tot meer interacties en daardoor ook een indirect positief effect op de aanbeveling zelf kan hebben.



## **Curriculum Vitae**

Mirjam Tuk (Rhoon, 1981) received her secondary education diploma at the Maarten Luther Scholengemeenschap in 1998. She studied Psychology at the University of Amsterdam. In 2002, she graduated cum laude in the field of Social Psychology. She started as a PhD student at the Rotterdam School of Management at the Erasmus University Rotterdam in 2002. Currently, she works as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Groningen.



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## IS FRIENDSHIP SILENT WHEN MONEY TALKS?

### HOW PEOPLE RESPOND TO WORD-OF-MOUTH MARKETING

Word of mouth is a powerful source of consumer influence. Therefore, marketers nowadays are interested in managing word of mouth. An often implemented strategy is stimulating customers to talk about a product by providing a (financial) reward for successful recommendations ('buzz'). Previous research showed that rewards have a positive influence on recommendation likelihood. In this dissertation, it is investigated how people receiving these rewarded recommendations evaluate these recommendations and the recommending agent. It is argued that a reward leads to three important changes in the recommendation, and their impact is investigated in a series of experiments. First, a reward introduces a sales aspect in the interaction, and thereby transgresses boundaries that exist between sales and friendship norms. Second, the reward sheds doubts on the trustworthiness of the recommendation (agent). Third, rewarded recommendations are relatively often directed towards weak ties (i.e., acquaintances and less intimate friends). This dissertation shows that cues that hint at the presence of a financial reward (by increased salience of sales relationship norms, a disclosure of the reward, or by a slightly untrustworthy appearance) have a positive effect; people evaluate the recommending agent more positively than when these cues are lacking. The impact of these factors on product evaluations and recommendation compliance is mixed. To gain insight in weak tie recommendations, the impact of social categorization was examined. Recommendations from outgroup members can backfire and lead to contrasting evaluations of the target product. Ultimately, this dissertation provides in-depth insights into rewarded recommendations from a target point-of-view.

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