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Multiple Motives and Persuasive Communication: Creative Elaboration as a Result of Impression Motivation and Accuracy Motivation

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The authors examined the influence of impression motivation (Experiments 1 and 2) and the combined effects of accuracy motivation and impression motivation (Experiment 3) on the elaboration of persuasive messages as reflected in attitude change and cognitive responses. Intermediate levels of impression motivation led to elaboration of message arguments but high levels of impression motivation did not. The authors argue that the latter finding reflects the operation of creative processing of messages, whereby receivers draw on their own arguments. However, this pattern of results only occurred when individuals also were motivated to hold valid attitudes. When accuracy concerns were lower, high impression motivation was necessary to motivate elaboration of message content. Thus, it was the combined impact of accuracy motivation and high impression motivation that stimulated participants to go beyond the information provided. Implications of these findings are discussed.

In the attitude change literature, receivers of persuasive communications are generally assumed to have a basic need to hold accurate attitudes. However, the concern to make a good impression on others is another motivation that can influence the processing of persuasive messages (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996; Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989). There is extensive research on the impact of accuracy motivation on attitude change and cognitive responses (see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993) but empirical evidence with respect to the influence of impression motivation is relatively limited. One objective of the present article is to investigate the impact of impression motivation more closely. Such research as there is on impression motivation has tended to focus on the impact of accuracy versus impression motivation (e.g., Chen, Shechter, & Chaiken, 1996). A secondary aim of the research reported below was to investigate the combined influence of these two types of motivation. This is important given that in everyday life people are unlikely to be exclusively motivated to develop accurate views or to make a good impression on others.

The two dominant models currently used to study the effects of motivation on the processing of persuasive messages are the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and the Heuristic Systematic Model (HSM) (Chaiken, 1980; Chaiken et al., 1989). Both the ELM and the HSM postulate that there are two routes to persuasion and that these routes reflect the extent of message processing. The ELM charts a central route and a peripheral route, whereas the HSM distinguishes between systematic processing and heuristic processing. According to both models, it is the favorability of the thoughts evoked by the arguments in a persuasive message that bring about lasting attitude change. The number and valence of message-relevant thoughts depend on the extent to which the recipient is willing or able to process the message. Recipients who are motivated and able to elaborate the message should have predominantly favorable thoughts when exposed to a mes-

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sage with strong arguments and predominantly unfavorable thoughts when exposed to a weak message, and both models predict that recipients will change their attitudes accordingly. However, a recipient who is less motivated and/or less able to process the message should pay less attention to the arguments in the message and should therefore be less responsive to argument quality.

These models were founded on the assumption that recipients who process a message systematically are motivated to hold valid attitudes. According to Petty (1994), “The ELM assumes that the default motive in persuasion settings is to understand the world and develop accurate views” (p. 231). The impact of the argument quality manipulation is generally regarded as reflecting the extent of elaboration participants engage in when they are motivated to be accurate. However, Chaiken et al. (1989) reasoned that under particular circumstances, message recipients might be primarily motivated to make a good impression (impression motivation) or to defend their own point of view (defense motivation) rather than striving for accuracy. Chaiken et al.’s (1989) concept of impression motivation is similar to constructs such as impression-relevant involvement (Johnson & Eagly, 1989) and response involvement (Leippe & Elkin, 1987). According to Chen et al. (1996), impression motivation refers to the desire to hold attitudes that will satisfy current social goals. The common element in these conceptions of impression motivation is the notion that attitudes are used strategically in the interests of impression management (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985). Leippe and Elkin (1987) reasoned that response-involved participants might be attentive to a persuasive message but would resist being influenced by its arguments because of the self-presentational advantages of maintaining a flexible and nonpolarized position. Chaiken et al. (1996) argued that impression motivation would invoke processing that is guided by selectivity in order to be able to express attitudes that will promote current social goals. In the present research, we define impression motivation simply as a wish to be positively evaluated by others. In addition, we regard impression motivation as a continuum. In line with Leary and Kowalski (1990), we argue that situational and dispositional factors combine to determine the position of individuals on such an impression motivation continuum, with at one extreme individuals who care little about others’ reactions to them and at the other extreme individuals who are highly sensitive to others’ evaluations.

As noted above, evidence concerning the influence of impression motivation on message processing is limited. Leippe and Elkin (1987) manipulated what they called “response involvement” (as opposed to “issue involvement”) by leading participants to believe that they would later have to discuss the message issue with someone else. They found that response-involved participants were attentive to the message but were not influenced by the quality of the message and expressed moderate attitudes. It had been anticipated that these participants would do one of three things: (a) engage in central-route processing but be biased toward moderation, (b) only display moderate attitudes publicly (rather than privately), and (c) not engage in central-route processing at all. Some support was found for each of these predictions. Chen et al. (1996, Experiment 1) distinguished between low and high self-monitors—who presumably differ with respect to a dispositional concern with the impression they make—and used priming techniques to manipulate accuracy versus impression motivation (Experiment 2) to examine how these two types of motivation influenced reactions to information about “a future interaction partner.” Impression-motivated participants were influenced by partner attitude information, whereas accuracy-motivated participants processed information in an unbiased way. All participants, however, engaged in some degree of both heuristic and systematic processing. Thus, there is evidence that impression-motivated individuals process information in a way that is influenced by their social goals.

Nienhuis, Manstead, and Spears (1998) examined the influence of impression motivation on attitudes by using transmitter sets (see Guerin & Innes, 1989). In the critical set, participants receive information while expecting that they will later have to pass on (i.e., transmit) some or all of this information to another person at a later stage. Nienhuis et al. argued that such a transmitter set can be seen as a means of enhancing impression motivation. The interpersonal context of a transmitter set should elicit motivational goals that could reasonably be described as impression motivation (see also Leippe & Elkin, 1987). Nienhuis et al. (1998) varied two types of transmitter instruction and combined these with a priming procedure to enhance impression motivation in order to create three hypothetical levels of impression motivation: low, intermediate, and high. Impression motivation appeared to be related to elaboration (as reflected by the impact of argument quality) in a curvilinear manner: Moderate levels of impression motivation led individuals to elaborate message arguments, whereas at low and high levels the extent of elaboration was no longer a function of argument quality. The authors argued that this absence of an argument quality effect resulted from insufficient motivation at low levels of impression motivation and from the predominance of social concerns at high levels of impression motivation. Consistent with this explanation, transmitters who were supposed to persuade another participant of the validity of the experimentally provided message and who were
also highly motivated to make a good impression generated arguments of their own when the quality of arguments in the message was weak. By generating new arguments in favor of the position in the message, the positivity of their thoughts was higher than would be expected on the basis of a weak message, and consequently, so too were their attitudes. This creative process undermined the effect of argument quality under conditions of high impression motivation.

These effects of increasing impression motivation on elaboration of messages were observed when different motivational factors were combined in order to create what were assumed to be varying degrees of impression motivation. One goal of the present research was to provide a more straightforward test of the prediction that high levels of impression motivation can lead to creative processing and thereby undermine the typical impact of argument quality. In Experiment 1, we manipulate three levels of a factor (anticipation of evaluation) that should have an impact on impression motivation. Consistent with the results of our previous research, we predict that such a manipulation should result in greater elaboration of message arguments at intermediate levels of impression motivation than at low or high levels. In Experiment 2, we focus more closely on the processes mediating such effects.

A second goal of the present research is to shed more light on the combined effects of accuracy motivation and impression motivation on elaboration. The fact that argument quality effects were found by Nienhuis et al. (1998) among participants who were moderately impression motivated suggests that these participants engaged in systematic processing, presumably motivated by accuracy concerns. However, there has been very little research explicitly examining the combined effects of these two types of motivation, despite the fact that it seems reasonable to suppose that individuals are rarely (if ever) exclusively motivated to hold valid attitudes or to make a good impression on others. To gain more insight into the combined effects of accuracy motivation and impression motivation on the elaboration of persuasive messages, in Experiment 3 we manipulate accuracy motivation (two levels: lower vs. higher) and impression motivation (three levels) independently in a factorial design. The predictions for this study will be described when we introduce Experiment 3.

In summary, the present research was designed to examine (a) how impression motivation relates to elaboration of message arguments (Experiment 1), (b) which process might be responsible for this relationship (Experiment 2), and (c) the combined effects of accuracy motivation and impression motivation (Experiment 3). In all three studies, participants read a persuasive communication containing strong or weak arguments while expecting that they would later have to persuade another participant of the validity of the position expressed in the message. We created three levels of impression motivation by varying the number of persons who would ostensibly evaluate participants’ performance on the transmitter task. High or low accuracy motivation was induced by means of a priming procedure (Chen et al., 1996).

EXPERIMENT 1

Participants

A total of 70 students at the University of Amsterdam (23 men, 47 women) participated in this study. Their average age was 22.50, with a range from 18 to 37 years. They were paid 12.50 Dfls. (approximately U.S.$8) for their participation.

Design and Independent Variables

The design was a $2 \times 3$ factorial. The independent variables were argument quality (weak vs. strong) and impression motivation (low, intermediate, or high). Participants were randomly allocated to one of the six conditions.

Argument quality. A set of 40 arguments concerning legalization of hard drugs was first rated for its persuasiveness. Participants were asked how persuasive they thought each argument was when used in favor of a particular proposition. The eight highest scoring and eight lowest scoring arguments were used to construct a strong and a weak message, respectively. The complete messages also were piloted. Forty-one participants were presented with either the strong or the weak message and were asked to rate how persuasive, believable, comprehensive, complex, and familiar it was. The messages differed significantly with respect to persuasiveness, $t(39) = 2.55, p < .01$ ($M_{\text{weak}} = 3.30, M_{\text{strong}} = 4.70$, on a 7-point scale). No differences between the messages were found with respect to comprehensibility or complexity, although the messages did differ with respect to believability ($M_{\text{weak}} = 3.29, M_{\text{strong}} = 4.30$), $t(39) = 2.06, p < .05$, and originality ($M_{\text{weak}} = 3.38, M_{\text{strong}} = 2.50$), $t(39) = 2.35, p < .05$.

Induction of impression and transmitter set. Just before the message was received, all participants were told that they were about to read a short essay in which a proposition would be supported by a number of arguments. They were led to believe that “later in the experiment you will be asked to defend this proposition yourself to another participant. You will have to persuade this person of the validity of the statement. Precise instructions will follow later.” Subsequently, one third (low
impression) of the participants were told the following: “At this point, we would like to warn you that in this study of communication, we are primarily interested in the behavior of the receiver of communication. During your presentation, the focus will therefore be on the other participant, not on you.” In the intermediate impression condition, participants were told the following: “At this point, we would like to warn you that in this study of communication, we are primarily interested in the behavior of the sender of communication. The other participant will therefore be asked to evaluate your presentation on several dimensions so that we can determine afterwards how well you have done.” Finally, the high impression participants were told that we were primarily interested in the behavior of the sender of communication. Participants were then told the following: “The other participant will therefore be asked to evaluate your presentation on several dimensions, such as persuasiveness, fluency, and vividness, so that we can determine afterward how well you have done. In addition to the other participant, two other people will monitor your persuasion attempt. These persons will act as independent judges and will primarily focus on whether you make a good impression. They will take notes and after consulting the other participant they will make a final judgment.”

In a pilot study, 91 participants were asked to imagine themselves taking part in an experiment in which they would be asked to persuade another participant of the validity of a proposition advanced in an essay they were about to read. We varied the instruction as described above. They were then asked to indicate to what extent they thought that it would be important (a) to avoid looking foolish in the eyes of the audience, (b) to make a good impression, and (c) to present themselves well, each rating being made on a 7-point scale. These items were combined to form an impression scale (alpha = .81). As expected, analysis of variance revealed a main effect of impression motivation, F(2, 88) = 4.26, p < .05. Participants in the high impression motivation condition scored higher (M = 4.88) than did those in the intermediate impression motivation condition (M = 4.33), who in turn scored higher than those in the low impression motivation condition (M = 4.06). The linear trend was highly significant, F(1, 88) = 8.21, p < .01.

Dependent Variables

Attitude. Attitude to the message issue (i.e., legalization of hard drugs) was measured on two occasions. The first was at the start of the experiment, prior to message exposure. The key item was embedded in a group of 14 attitude statements, the other 13 addressing issues unrelated to drugs. Participants were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a scale with endpoints labeled strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (7). The wording of the key item was as follows: “Dealing in hard drugs should be legalized and controlled by the government.” After exposure to the message, attitude was measured a second time using an 8-item scale. Pilot research had already shown this measure to have good internal consistency (alpha = .90). Among the eight items was the item used in the pretest. Examples of other items are as follows: “Legalization of hard drugs is an excellent way to keep the problems of drug addiction under control”; “If the government were to take over control of disposing hard drugs, many lives would be saved”; and “Legalization of hard drugs would create far more problems for society than there ever would be under illegality” (reverse-scored).

Thought listing. After they had read the message, participants were asked to write down every thought that had come to mind while reading it. Then they were asked to indicate whether each thought was pro, anti, or neutral with respect to the position advocated in the message.

Argument listing. Near the end of the experiment, participants were asked to write down every argument that they planned to use in their attempt to persuade the other participant.

Reading time. The amount of time that was needed to read the message was recorded. To control for differences in reading speed, we also recorded how much time participants needed to read various general instructions.

Arousal adjectives. After implementation of the manipulations and after assessing attitudes and thoughts, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they felt worried, interested, tense, driven, precise, inspired, nervous, productive, and enthusiastic. They reported these feelings on 7-point scales, one endpoint being labeled with one of these adjectives and the other with its semantic opposite (e.g., calm vs. nervous).

Manipulation Check

Participants answered two or three questions, depending on condition. First, they were asked to indicate whether they had been told that their presentation would be evaluated. They could answer by indicating “yes” or “no.” Second, participants were asked whether they thought we were primarily interested in the sender or the receiver of communication. Participants in the intermediate and high impression conditions were further asked to indicate the number of persons who would evaluate them. They could choose between five alternatives, ranging from 0 to 4 persons.
Procedure

The experiment was fully computerized except for the thought-listing task, which was assessed by paper and pencil. Participants were seated alone in one of eight cubicles, each with its own terminal. The experiment was introduced as a study of communication and opinions. Participants began by answering some demographic questions. The experiment commenced with the pretest attitude items. Participants then did a 5-minute filler task. Next, they received their transmitter instructions, which were followed by the impression manipulation. They then read the message. After reading the message, participants reported their attitudes and listed their thoughts. Subsequently, the arousal ratings were made and participants were asked to list the arguments they planned to use for their persuasion attempt. Finally, the items that were used as a manipulation check were completed. At the end of the experiment, participants were fully debriefed concerning the nature and purpose of the study.

Results

Manipulation Check

Almost all (95.5%) of the participants who were not told that they would be evaluated (low impression) remembered that nothing had been said about their persuasion attempt being evaluated. A large majority (70.8%) of participants who were told that they would be evaluated by the other participant indicated that they remembered that they were told to expect this evaluation. Almost two thirds (62.5%) of the participants in the intermediate impression condition thought that they would be evaluated by one person (i.e., the other participant). A majority (75.0%) of participants in the high impression condition indicated that they expected to be evaluated. Also, a majority (79.2%) of these participants indicated that they would be evaluated by three persons (i.e., the other participant and two independent judges).4 Finally, all (100%) participants in the low impression condition correctly remembered that they were primarily interested in the receiver of communication, all (100%) participants in the intermediate impression condition correctly remembered that the primary focus of the experiment was on the sender of communication, and the vast majority (97.7%) of participants in the high impression condition also correctly remembered these instructions.

Attitude

The mean score on the 8-item scale was entered into an analysis of covariance, with the 1-item attitude pretest as a covariate and Argument Quality and Impression Motivation as factors. This analysis revealed a significant two-way interaction, $F(2, 63) = 4.08, p < .05$. The means are shown in Table 1. To interpret the two-way interaction, we analyzed the simple effect of Argument Quality within levels of Impression Motivation. In line with our hypothesis, only participants in the intermediate impression condition had more positive attitudes after receiving a strong message than after receiving a weak message, $F(1, 63) = 4.79, p < .05$. Participants in the low impression condition did not differ in their attitudes as a function of Argument Quality, whereas participants in the high impression condition reported marginally more positive attitudes when they had received a weak message rather than a strong message, $F(1, 63) = 3.10, p = .08$. Thus, the interaction reflects the fact that the Argument Quality effect was significant in the intermediate impression condition and exhibited a nonsignificant reversal in the high impression condition.

Thought Listing

The three different types of thoughts (positive, negative, neutral) were combined by subtracting the number of negative thoughts from the number of positive thoughts and dividing this number by the sum of all thoughts listed.5 The result could vary from −1 (only negative thoughts) through 0 (neither negative nor positive) to 1 (only positive thoughts). This index was entered into an analysis of variance, with Argument Quality and Impression Motivation as factors. This analysis revealed a two-way interaction, $F(2, 64) = 3.82, p < .05$. In line with the results for attitude, the means in Table 1 show that only participants in the intermediate impression condition reported more positive thoughts after receiving a strong message than after receiving a weak message, $F(1, 64) = 6.89, p < .01$. Low impression participants did not differ in positivity of thoughts as a function of Argument Quality. The positivity of thoughts of participants in the high impression condition was in the same direction as the positivity of their attitudes, but this difference was not significant.

Mediation Analyses

According to the ELM and the HSM, extent of message-relevant thinking mediates the impact of argument quality on attitudes. When attitude mean scores were entered into an analysis of covariance, using Argument Quality and Impression Motivation as factors and both the thought-listing index and the attitude pretest score as covariates, the three-way interaction was reduced to nonsignificance, $F(2, 62) = 1.70, ns$.

Argument Listing

The arguments listed by participants were classified with respect to whether they had been present in the
TABLE 1: Mean Scores for Attitude (adjusted) and Thought Listing as a Function of Argument Quality and Impression Motivation (Experiment 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument Quality</th>
<th>Impression Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>3.98 (.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought listing</td>
<td>-.34 (.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>4.29 (.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought listing</td>
<td>-.35 (.62)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Attitude scores range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), with the position advocated in the message; thought-listing scores range from −1 (only negative thoughts) through 0 (neither negative nor positive) to 1 (only positive thoughts). Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Arousal Adjectives

Factor analysis of the nine adjectives resulted in two factors (explaining 65.8% of the variance), which we labeled positive arousal (interested, driven, precise, inspired, productive, and enthusiastic) and negative arousal (worried, tense, and nervous). Scores within these two sets of items were then averaged to form a positive arousal scale (alpha = .85) and a negative arousal scale (alpha = .82). Analysis of variance using the positive arousal scale as a dependent variable revealed no significant effects. Analysis of variance using the negative arousal scale as a dependent variable revealed a marginally significant main effect of Impression Motivation, $F(2, 64) = 2.93, p = .06$. Participants in the high impression condition experienced more negative arousal ($M = 3.68$) than did participants in either the intermediate ($M = 2.86$) or the low ($M = 3.00$) impression conditions.

DISCUSSION

Nienhuis et al. (1998) suggested that different motivational variables combine to determine where a given individual falls on a hypothetical impression motivation dimension. Their assumption was that at moderate levels of impression motivation, individuals engage primarily in elaboration of the content of the persuasive communication, whereas at higher levels, elaboration is increasingly influenced by the individual’s social goals. The point at which individuals reach this high level depends on the presence or absence of other motivational factors, which can be dispositional (e.g., social anxiety) or situational (e.g., the expectation that one will be evaluated). The present findings confirm this view: Varying the number of persons who would evaluate participants enabled us to replicate the previously observed nonlinear relationship. Under conditions of intermediate impression motivation, positivity of attitudes and thoughts was a function of argument quality: Participants had more positive attitudes and thoughts when they received a weak message rather than a strong one. However, the argument quality effect was absent under conditions of high impression motivation: Indeed, participants had somewhat more positive attitudes when they received a weak rather than a strong message, although the positivity of their thoughts did not vary significantly as a function of argument quality. The positivity of attitudes and thoughts also did not vary as a function of argument quality in the low impression condition.

The results from the argument-listing measure offer an explanation for the undermining of the argument quality effect under conditions of high impression motivation. Increasing impression motivation led to an increase in the relative number of new arguments gener-
ated, and participants in the high impression condition who received a weak message were especially likely to generate relatively more new arguments. This generation of new arguments in favor of the message presumably led to their thoughts and their attitudes being more positive than would be expected after exposure to a weak message.

Although this creative-processing explanation for the nonlinear relationship between impression motivation and elaboration of message arguments strikes us as plausible, other potential explanations need to be ruled out. First, we cannot be sure that participants generated the new arguments while reading the message. Yet, this is necessary to be able to conclude that this creativity exerted any influence on the positivity of attitudes. Perhaps high impression participants were too nervous to process the message, with the result that they were forced to generate their own arguments because they could not remember the arguments that were provided in the message. Indeed, analysis of the arousal data suggests that high impression motivation induced a higher level of negative arousal. In addition, high impression participants took longer to read the message. Although we would prefer to regard these findings as reflecting creative elaboration, they also could be seen as being consistent with the notion of cognitive overload.

It is also possible that the absence of an argument quality effect on attitudes under conditions of high impression motivation was due to a desire to express neutral attitudes, irrespective of argument quality. By avoiding extreme opinions, participants could appear flexible in the eyes of others because they have not committed themselves to a strong anti-message or pro-message position (cf. Leippe & Elkin, 1987). Moreover, in the context of our transmitter instruction, it is possible that participants expressed a more positive attitude than they otherwise would have done because they believed that pretending that they themselves favored the issue would help them to persuade the other participant. The generation of new arguments might be regarded as resulting from their wish to make a good impression, and to succeed in their persuasion attempt, and it might have had no influence on attitudes. This line of explanation is rendered somewhat less likely by the fact that participants were in no way led to expect that the other participant would be informed of the positivity of their attitudes. Nevertheless, we wanted to rule out the possibility that reported attitudes reflected knowingly reporting a false attitude in order to achieve a strategic goal.

EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 2 was designed to answer the following questions: (a) Does negative arousal evoked by an increase in impression motivation impair message processing? (b) Are new arguments generated during message exposure? and (c) Are participants aware of an inclination to report attitudes that are not genuine in the sense that they would privately hold one position but publicly express another? We addressed these issues by conducting a modified replication of Experiment 1. The procedure was identical to that of Experiment 1 up to and including the reading of the message. At that point, the attitude and thought-listing measures were replaced by other measures.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 81 students at the University of Amsterdam (38 men, 43 women) participated. Their average age was 21.60, with a range from 18 to 34 years. They received 10.00 Dfls. (approximately U.S.$6).

Procedure and Independent Variables

The experiment was identical to Experiment 1 until participants had read the message. Thus, the study was introduced as being about communication and opinions. The experiment proper commenced with the pretest attitude items. Participants then completed a filler task that lasted 5 mins. Next, they received their transmitter instructions, which were followed by the instructions to induce low, intermediate, or high impression motivation, respectively. Participants then read a weak or strong message.

Dependent Variables and Results

After reading the message, participants were told that before the actual persuasion attempt took place we were interested in their answers to a series of questions.

Arousal. The first question was as follows: “To what extent do you feel tense or nervous because of the task you have to perform?” Participants answered on a scale with endpoints labeled not at all (1) and very (7). Analysis of variance revealed a marginally significant linear trend due to Impression Motivation, $F(1, 75) = 3.20, p = .08$. Participants in the high ($M = 3.31$) and the intermediate ($M = 3.29$) impression conditions felt somewhat more tense than did participants in the low impression condition ($M = 2.73$). Participants ($n = 48$) who scored 4 or higher on this measure were asked the following: “To what extent do you think your nervousness has affected the way in which you read the essay?” Almost half (45.8%) of the participants indicated that they had read the essay better, 41.7% said that their nervousness had had no effect, and only 12.5% indicated that they had...
read the essay worse, $\chi^2 = 9.50, df = 2, p < .009$. No significant differences were found between conditions.

**Arguments.** There followed two questions concerning the generation and use of arguments. The first was answered on a scale with endpoints labeled *not at all* (1) and *very much* (7) and read as follows: “To what extent have you generated your own arguments in favor of the proposition, which you will use for your persuasion attempt?” A main effect of Impression Motivation was found, $F(2, 75) = 5.24, p < .01$. Participants in the high impression condition had generated significantly more new arguments ($M = 4.15$) than did participants in either the intermediate ($M = 3.02$) or low ($M = 3.00$) impression conditions. A main effect of Argument Quality also was found, $F(1, 75) = 7.52, p < .01$. More arguments were generated when participants had received a weak ($M = 3.85$) rather than a strong message ($M = 2.93$). Participants also were asked the following: “In what proportion are you planning to use the arguments that were mentioned in the essay and the arguments you have generated yourself?” They answered on a scale with endpoints labeled *only arguments mentioned in message* (1) and *only my own arguments* (7), with the midpoint (4) labeled *equally from the message and my own*. Analysis of variance revealed a main effect of Impression Motivation, $F(2, 75) = 3.00, p = .05$. Participants in the high impression condition planned to use relatively more arguments of their own ($M = 3.63$) than did either intermediate ($M = 2.84$) or low ($M = 2.96$) impression participants. A main effect of Argument Quality also was found, $F(1, 75) = 13.53, p < .001$. Participants planned to use relatively fewer arguments contained in the weak message ($M = 3.67$) as compared with the strong one ($M = 2.62$).

**Own opinion.** Questions about the participant’s attitude followed, beginning with, “To what extent have you thought about your own opinion about this topic?” This was answered on a scale with endpoints labeled *not at all* (1) and *very much* (7). The overall mean of responses to this item was 5.52 ($SD = 1.07$), and analysis of variance revealed no effects. The next question was as follows: “If you were asked to indicate what your opinion is about the issue at this moment, would you feel inclined to conceal your real opinion?” Participants could choose one of four alternatives. Only 3.7% of participants answered, “Yes, I would act as if I were more opposed to the issue than I really am.” Only 7.4% of participants chose the option, “Yes, I would take a neutral position, although my opinion is decided.” The option, “Yes, I would act as if I were more in favor of the issue than I really am” was chosen by 9.9% of participants. A substantial majority (79.0%) answered, “No, I would indicate precisely how I feel toward the issue,” $\chi^2 = 126.65, df = 3, p < .001$. Further analysis revealed no significant differences between conditions. For example, the 9.9% of participants who had chosen the “more in favor” option were evenly distributed across conditions.

Participants also were asked to indicate the reason for their answer. The 3.7% ($n = 3$) who chose the “more opposed” option gave no reason for their answer. The 7.4% ($n = 6$) who had chosen the neutral option explained that their attitudes were indeed neutral or that they would not form a serious opinion after reading such a short essay. The majority of the 9.9% ($n = 8$) who had chosen the “more in favor” option indicated that their objective was to pretend to be more in favor to help them succeed in their persuasion attempt. The 79.0% ($n = 64$) who chose the “genuine” option justified their answer in terms such as, “Why should I hide my opinion?” or by more principled considerations such as, “You should always be frank about your opinion, as long as you don’t hurt someone by expressing it.”

Participants were further asked, “To what extent do you think it is important that the other participant whom you have to persuade will not know what your own opinion about the issue is?” This was answered on a scale with endpoints labeled *not at all* (1) and *very* (7). The mean response to this item was 2.35 ($SD = 1.53$). Analysis of variance revealed no effects.

**Manipulation Check**

Participants were then asked to what extent they thought it was important to make a good impression on the participant whom they had to persuade. Responses were made on a scale with endpoints labeled *not at all* (1) and *very* (7). Analysis of variance revealed a main effect of Impression, $F(2, 75) = 4.27, p < .05$. High impression participants thought it was more important to make a good impression ($M = 4.70$) than did participants in the intermediate impression ($M = 3.89$) or low impression ($M = 3.54$) conditions. The linear trend also was significant, $F(1, 75) = 8.12, p < .01$.

Participants’ memory for their instructions also was assessed. The measures were identical to those used in Experiment 1. All (100%) participants who were not told that they would be evaluated (low impression) remembered that nothing had been said about their persuasion attempt being evaluated. A large majority (74.1%) of those who were told that they would be evaluated by the other participant remembered that they were told to expect this evaluation. Also, a majority (74.1%) of these participants in the intermediate impression condition indicated that they would be evaluated by one person (i.e., the other participant). A substantial majority (85.7%) of participants in the high impression condition indicated that they expected to be evaluated. Also, a large majority (82.1%) of these participants expected that they would be evaluated by three persons (i.e., the
other participant and two independent judges). Finally, almost all (96.2%) participants in the low impression condition correctly remembered that we were primarily interested in the receiver of communication, whereas the vast majority of participants both in the intermediate impression condition (92.6%) and in the high impression condition (92.6%) correctly remembered that the primary focus of the experiment was on the sender of communication. At the end of the experiment, participants were fully debriefed concerning the nature and purpose of the study.

**DISCUSSION**

This study was designed to answer three questions. The first was whether negative arousal would impair message processing. Only a small percentage of participants reported that this was the case. Moreover, almost half claimed to have read the message better due to their nervousness about their task, whereas the remainder said that they were unaffected by their nervousness. These results render less plausible the cognitive overload explanation for the undermining of the argument quality effect under conditions of high impression motivation.

The second question was whether new arguments were generated during message exposure or at a later stage. High impression participants were more likely to have generated their own arguments than were participants in the other conditions, even when they were asked this question almost immediately after message exposure. They also planned to use relatively more of these self-generated arguments and fewer arguments provided in the message than did participants in the intermediate and low impression conditions. Taken together, these results confirm the findings from the argument listing used in Experiment 1, and they show that the generation of new arguments has already taken place just after exposure to the message.

The third question was whether participants planned to report their attitudes in a consciously strategic way, for example, by expressing a moderate opinion that they did not privately hold or by expressing attitudes that were more positive than what they privately thought. Only a small percentage of participants reported doing this, whereas a substantial majority indicated that they would report their real opinion if they were asked to do so. Moreover, no differences were found between conditions, showing that increasing impression motivation does not enhance this consciously strategic use of attitude expression. Taken at face value, these results suggest that this type of strategic use of attitudes plays a minor role in the present paradigm. This does not, of course, rule out the possibility that attitude expressions were strategic in a less restrictive sense: It is clearly possible that participants were unaware of the impact of a strategy on their attitude expression and were therefore unable to report it or that they were unwilling to acknowledge the fact that their attitude expressions were influenced by these strategic considerations. A further point worth noting is that attitudes may be influenced by strategic factors without being false in the sense that there is a discrepancy between a privately held attitude and the one that the individual publicly expresses. It is possible for the systematic processing of a persuasive message to be biased by strategic considerations and therefore to result in genuinely held attitudes that nevertheless reflect the impact of the strategic factors (see Chaiken, 1980; Killeya & Johnson, 1998; Leippe & Elkin, 1987).

In conclusion, Experiments 1 and 2 show that different levels of impression motivation have an impact on the way in which a persuasive message is elaborated. Greater elaboration of message arguments was found at intermediate levels of impression motivation than at low or high levels. The undermining of the argument quality effect at a high level of impression motivation is in our view most likely due to the creative process of generating one’s own arguments. Experiment 3 takes this line of research one step further by examining the combined effects of impression motivation and accuracy motivation on elaboration.

**EXPERIMENT 3**

Although little is known about the combined impact of impression motivation and accuracy motivation, we suggest that these two motivations are likely to interact in determining attitude change. Leippe and Elkin’s (1987) findings are consistent with this expectation. Their high issue-involved participants were responsive to argument quality, in keeping with the assumption that the argument quality effect reflects message processing in the service of accuracy motivation. Their high response-involved participants, on the other hand, were not responsive to the argument quality manipulation, consistent with our notion that increasing impression motivation undermines the argument quality effect. In the combined high issue-involvement and high response-involvement condition, there was a marginal effect of argument quality, suggesting that the two motivations attenuated each other’s effects as participants tried to reconcile conflicting motivations. Leippe and Elkin’s argument that the two types of motivation interfered with each other was based on their assumption that response involvement enhances the strategic use of attitudes. As noted earlier, these authors reasoned that response-involved participants might be motivated to form moderate attitudes due to the self-presentational advantages of appearing flexible in the eyes of a future.
Experiments 1 and 2 of the present article suggest that bias toward moderation is only one possible consequence of a desire to make a good impression on others. If high impression motivation sometimes leads participants to generate their own arguments, there is no reason to suppose that enhanced accuracy motivation would attenuate this creative process. Accuracy motivation typically results in objective processing, as reflected in the normal effect of an argument quality manipulation. However, an enhanced motivation to be accurate might assist the creative processing of messages that appears to characterize participants in the present paradigm who are high in impression motivation by helping them to think of and elaborate arguments that would make a good impression on the audience. This line of reasoning suggests that the normal argument quality effect should be especially likely to be undermined by the combination of enhanced accuracy and high impression motivation.

Intermediate levels of impression motivation were found in Experiment 1 to lead participants to elaborate message arguments, and it seems reasonable to suggest that this process could only be assisted by enhancing accuracy motivation. In the case of low impression motivation, it seems reasonable to suggest that enhancing accuracy motivation would lead participants to elaborate message arguments. However, it may be the case that a desire to be accurate only results in standard elaboration of message arguments in a context that is also motivating in other respects. As Chaiken et al. (1996) have proposed, “Even though a person may be driven to seek accuracy, the actual result of processing may fall short of this goal” (p. 557).

The effects of combining impression motivation and accuracy motivation were tested in an extended replication of Experiment 1. The extension took the form of adding a manipulation of accuracy motivation. In one set of conditions, motivation to be accurate was enhanced by means of priming. In another set of conditions, participants were exposed to a control prime.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

A total of 137 students at the University of Amsterdam (39 men, 98 women) participated. Their average age was 22, with a range from 17 to 34 years. They were paid 12.50 Dfls. (approximately U.S.$8).

**Design, Independent Variables, and Procedure**

The design was a $2 \times 3 \times 2$ factorial. The independent variables were argument quality (weak vs. strong), impression motivation (low, intermediate, or high), and accuracy motivation (control vs. enhanced). Participants were randomly allocated to one of the 12 conditions. Procedures for manipulating Argument Quality and Impression Motivation and for implementing Transmitter Set were the same as in Experiment 1. Accuracy Motivation was manipulated by a priming procedure. After the attitude pretest and before participants received their transmitter instructions, they were told that, due to the fact that not every participant had to do precisely the same things during the experiment, some spare time was available. This spare time was to be filled by having participants complete a short questionnaire that was part of “another, unrelated experiment.” The short questionnaire consisted of three scenarios that participants were asked to read carefully. They then had to write down how they would react in each situation. After completing the scenarios, participants proceeded with the main experiment. This priming procedure was based on the one used by Chen et al. (1996), although the scenarios were translated into Dutch and their content was adapted to make them appropriate to Dutch culture. Half of the participants read scenarios about situations in which the importance of being accurate was the theme (providing future undergraduates with objective, sufficient, and accurate information; joining in a discussion at a family party in order to make sure the discussants see both sides of an issue; finding information in order to be able to make a decision that will have a significant impact on your own quality of life). Other participants read scenarios about situations that could arouse some agitation but that were designed to be irrelevant with respect to accuracy concerns (a strike by train personnel as you are en route to the wedding of a distant relative, excessive noise coming from a party held by an upstairs neighbor, getting lost in the woods alone during a short holiday with your friends).

These motivational sets were pretested by presenting each of 122 students at the University of Amsterdam with the three scenarios that formed one set. In the second, apparently unrelated part of the study, we asked them to read a short essay, which contained either weak or strong arguments in favor of a proposition (compulsory HIV testing). Finally, participants were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with seven attitude statements that related to the topic of the essay. Ratings were made on a 7-point scale (higher scores indicating more agreement). These messages and attitude items had been pretested and used in earlier research (Nienhuis et al., 1998). The mean attitude score was entered into
an analysis of variance, using Argument Quality and Motivational Set as independent factors, and a significant two-way interaction was found, \( F(1, 118) = 6.88, p < .01 \). As expected, participants who had completed the accuracy scenarios reported more positive attitudes when they had read the strong message (\( M = 4.32 \)) than when they had read the weak message (\( M = 2.98 \)), \( F(1, 118) = 12.85, p < .001 \). By contrast, attitudes of participants who had completed the control scenarios were no more positive after reading a strong message (\( M = 3.66 \)) than after reading a weak message (\( M = 3.68 \)). All dependent variables in Experiment 3 were assessed in the same way as in Experiment 1. The procedure differed only with respect to the addition of the priming procedure used to induce accuracy motivation.

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Almost all (97.8%) of the participants who were not told that they would be evaluated (low impression) remembered that nothing had been said about their persuasion attempt being evaluated. A majority (70.5%) of participants who were told that they would be evaluated by the other participant indicated that they remembered that they were told to expect this evaluation. Moreover, the vast majority (88.6%) of these participants in the intermediate impression condition indicated that they would be evaluated by one person (i.e., the other participant). Almost all (97.9%) participants in the high impression condition indicated that they expected to be evaluated. A majority (74.5%) of these participants indicated that they would be evaluated by three persons (i.e., the other participant and two independent judges). Finally, all (100%) participants in the low impression condition correctly remembered that we were primarily interested in the receiver of communication, whereas the vast majority (97.7%) of participants in the intermediate impression condition and all (100%) participants in the high impression condition correctly remembered that the primary focus of the experiment was on the sender of communication.

Attitude

Mean scores on the 8-item scale were entered into an analysis of covariance, with the 1-item attitude pretest as a covariate and Argument Quality, Impression Motivation, and Accuracy Motivation as factors. The three-way interaction was significant, \( F(2, 124) = 3.13, p < .05 \). The means are shown in Table 2. When mean attitude scores were entered into an analysis of covariance, using Argument Quality, Impression Motivation, and Accuracy Motivation as factors and both the thought-listing index and the attitude pretest score as covariates, the three-way interaction was reduced to nonsignificance, \( F(2, 123) = 1.77, ns. \)

Argument Listing

The arguments listed by participants were classified with respect to whether they had been present in the experimental message. This classification was performed by two independent judges, one of whom was blind to the participant’s experimental condition.
Mean Scores for Attitude (adjusted) and Thought Listing as a Function of Argument Quality, Impression Motivation, and Accuracy Motivation (Experiment 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument Quality</th>
<th>Impression Motivation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>4.54 (.42)</td>
<td>4.44 (.41)</td>
<td>3.69 (.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought listing</td>
<td>-.13 (.43)</td>
<td>.06 (.60)</td>
<td>-.57 (.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>4.42 (.23)</td>
<td>4.60 (.71)</td>
<td>4.57 (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought listing</td>
<td>-.16 (.41)</td>
<td>-.13 (.44)</td>
<td>-.07 (.47)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Attitude scores range from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7), with the position advocated in the message; thought-listing scores range from –1 (only negative thoughts) through 0 (neither negative nor positive) to 1 (only positive thoughts). Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Interjudge agreement was 82%; differences were resolved by discussion. These classifications were then transformed into one measure in the same way as in Experiment 1. Analysis of variance revealed a main effect of Argument Quality, \( F(1, 105) = 18.42, p < .001 \). Participants who received a weak message generated more new thoughts than did those who received a strong message (\( M_{weak} = .18, M_{strong} = -.24 \)). The two-way interaction between Impression Motivation and Accuracy and Accuracy Motivation was marginally significant, \( F(2, 105) = 2.86, p = .06 \). The means relating to this interaction (see Table 3) indicate that within the accuracy prime condition, greater levels of Impression Motivation resulted in a relatively greater number of new arguments being generated, \( F(2, 105) = 5.44, p < .01 \), whereas within the control prime condition, Impression Motivation had no significant impact on the proportion of new thoughts generated. Contrast analysis further showed that participants in the combined accuracy prime and high impression motivation condition generated relatively more new arguments than did participants in any other condition, contrast \( F(1, 111) = 4.61, p < .05 \). Although the three-way interaction between Argument Quality, Impression Motivation, and Accuracy Motivation was not significant, contrast analysis showed that participants in the combined accuracy prime and high impression motivation condition who received a weak message generated relatively more new thoughts (\( M_{acc/high/weak} = .59 \)) than did those in any other condition (\( M_{rest} = -.08 \)), contrast \( F(1, 105) = 14.14, p < .001 \).

Reading Time

The number of seconds participants took to read the message was entered into an analysis of covariance, using number of seconds needed to read general instructions as a covariate and Argument Quality, Impression Motivation, and Accuracy Motivation as factors. This revealed a main effect of Impression Motivation, \( F(2, 123) = 5.44, p < .01 \). Participants in the high impression condition took longer to read the message (\( M = 98.63 \) seconds) than did participants in either the intermediate (\( M = 77.40 \) seconds) or low (\( M = 70.45 \) seconds) impression conditions. The linear trend was significant, \( F(1, 123) = 10.11, p < .01 \).

Arousal Adjectives

Factor analysis of the nine adjectives resulted, as in Experiment 1, in two factors (explaining 66.3% of the variance). The two sets of items were again averaged to form a positive arousal scale (alpha = .83) and a negative arousal scale (alpha = .88). Analysis of variance using the positive arousal scale as a dependent variable revealed a two-way interaction between Argument Quality and Accuracy Motivation, \( F(1, 125) = 5.24, p < .05 \). Participants who received the accuracy prime and the weak message reported more positive arousal (\( M = 4.87 \)) than did accuracy-primed participants who received the strong message (\( M = 4.22 \)), \( F(1, 125) = 8.30, p < .01 \). Mean scores of control prime participants who received either the weak (\( M = 4.48 \)) or the strong message (\( M = 4.59 \)) fell between these two.

Analysis of variance using the negative arousal scale as a dependent variable revealed a two-way interaction between Impression Motivation and Accuracy Motivation, \( F(2, 125) = 3.07, p < .05 \). The means relating to this interaction are shown in Table 3. Participants in the high impression condition experienced significantly more negative arousal when they had received the accuracy prime than when they had received the control prime, \( F(1, 125) = 4.51, p < .05 \). Accuracy had no impact on participants in either the low or the intermediate impression conditions. In addition, increases in level of Impression Motivation were associated with significant increases in the negative arousal that participants felt after receiving the accuracy prime, \( F(2, 125) = 3.73, p < .05 \). When they had received the control prime, however, level of Impression Motivation had no significant impact on negative arousal.
TABLE 3: Mean Scores for Argument Index and Negative Arousal as a Function of Argument Quality, Impression Motivation, and Accuracy Motivation (Experiment 3)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Impression Motivation</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>–0.97</td>
<td>–0.08</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
<td>–0.20</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.58)</td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
<td>(0.56)</td>
<td>(0.51)</td>
<td>(0.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.45)</td>
<td>(1.66)</td>
<td>(1.44)</td>
<td>(1.08)</td>
<td>(1.58)</td>
<td>(1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>–0.07</td>
<td>–0.08</td>
<td>–0.09</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal</td>
<td>(0.58)</td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
<td>(0.53)</td>
<td>(0.56)</td>
<td>(0.51)</td>
<td>(0.46)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Argument index scores could range from –1 (only arguments from message) through 0 (both types of argument) to 1 (only new arguments); negative arousal scores could range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating more negative arousal. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

DISCUSSION

Experiment 1 demonstrated that under conditions of intermediate impression motivation, positivity of attitudes was a function of argument quality, whereas high levels of impression motivation undermined the argument quality effect. The present experiment combined different levels of impression motivation with two levels of accuracy motivation. The results were consistent with the findings of Experiment 1, but only when accuracy concerns had been primed. When accuracy motivation was lower, high levels of impression motivation were needed to motivate participants to elaborate the message content. When these participants were only slightly or intermediately motivated to make a good impression, the positivity of their attitudes did not vary as a function of argument quality. By contrast, when accuracy concerns had been enhanced, intermediate amounts of impression motivation were sufficient to motivate participants to engage in processing of message arguments. Furthermore, it was shown that individuals who were motivated to be accurate and also highly motivated to make a good impression no longer responded to the argument quality manipulation in the usual way.

The cognitive response data of Experiment 1 and the results of Experiment 2 suggested that this undermining of the argument quality effect is due to the process of generating arguments. The results of the present experiment are consistent with this interpretation. As level of impression motivation increased, so too did (a) the amount of time taken to read the message; (b) feelings of negative arousal, but only when accuracy was high; and (c) the number of new arguments generated, but again only when accuracy was high. Enhancing accuracy motivation increased (a) feelings of positive arousal, but only when arguments were weak, and (b) the number of new arguments generated, but only when impression motivation was high. Thus, impression motivation appears to enhance overall level of anxiety, especially when accuracy motivation is high, whereas accuracy motivation appears to encourage creative processing precisely when it is presumably most needed: when high levels of impression motivation are combined with weak message arguments. When participants are highly motivated to make a good impression and they are motivated to be accurate, their anxiety to succeed appears to stimulate their creative tendencies in a way that undermines the usual argument quality effect.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The present findings show that variations in the level of impression motivation have consequences for the way in which persons elaborate a persuasive communication. Only when individuals are at an intermediate level of impression motivation are they likely simply to elaborate on the arguments contained in the message, such that weak messages result in more negative cognitive responses and less attitude change than do strong messages. When impression motivation is high, individuals who are presented with weak messages are inclined to elaborate in a creative way, going beyond the information contained in the message in an effort to be able to present a more cogent and persuasive message to their anticipated audience. When impression motivation is low, our findings suggest that the likelihood of simply elaborating on the arguments contained in the message also is reduced. Here, however, the overall level of motivation is apparently too low for people to engage in systematic processing.

Although we have shown that under the circumstances obtained in our studies high levels of impression motivation stimulate people to engage in creative processing, we accept that under different circumstances these same high levels may evoke other processes, such as the strategic use of attitudes: Individuals may prefer to express moderate rather than extreme views or they may elect to align their views with those of their audience. Under high impression motivation conditions, such strategic use of attitudes probably occurs in combination with systematic processing. As noted earlier, this is consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (1996) and Leippe and Elkin (1987). However, it also is possible that very
highly impression-motivated individuals suffer from cognitive overload, thereby preventing them from engaging in systematic processing.

The findings of Experiment 3 suggest that our conclusions concerning the consequences of impression motivation only hold when those who are exposed to a persuasive communication also are motivated by the need to be accurate. Only when participants were primed to be concerned about accuracy did they elaborate message arguments at intermediate levels of impression motivation and add new arguments at high levels of impression motivation. One possible role of accuracy motivation in circumstances such as those prevailing in our high impression motivation condition, where impression concerns are salient, is that it helps individuals to determine the validity of arguments that may be used to persuade another individual and also to generate their own arguments if necessary.

Interestingly, there was no evidence of systematic processing of the persuasive communications when impression motivation was low, even when accuracy motivation had been enhanced through priming. This suggests that under certain conditions it may be necessary for individuals to experience a certain level of impression motivation in order to elaborate. A simple concern to hold the “right” attitude may be insufficient to evoke systematic processing unless other concerns (e.g., personal relevance or impression motivation) also are present.

The argument quality manipulation was originally used to vary the valence of thoughts, which should in turn mediate the positivity of attitudes (e.g., Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981). Within the ELM framework, this manipulation has developed into a means of establishing the presence of central route processing. If individuals are both able and motivated to process the content of a persuasive message, they should be more persuaded by a strong message than by a weak one. The present findings show that the argument quality effect only reflects one form of elaboration, which we have labeled elaboration of message arguments. The mere fact that attitudes and thoughts do not vary as a function of argument quality does not preclude the possibility that message recipients engaged in elaboration.

The notion of creative elaboration has a long history in social psychology. The improvising of arguments was an important component of the explanation for role-playing effects obtained by Janis and King (1954; King & Janis, 1956). Tuning-set researchers have explained transmitter set effects in terms of transmitters having to generate arguments in favor of the advocated position (Holt & Watts, 1969). However, this type of creative processing has not previously been associated with a conventional persuasion setting or with the argument quality manipulation. We have shown that under certain conditions, creative processing occurs spontaneously after reception of a persuasive message, and in doing so, we have demonstrated the limits of the argument quality manipulation. The absence of an argument quality effect does not always imply the absence of elaboration (Leippe & Elkin, 1987). Cognitive response measures may still reveal the occurrence of creative processing. Forms of elaboration other than elaboration of message arguments may be relatively common, even in conventional persuasion settings. It is therefore important that response measures are refined to make it easier to identify the occurrence of different forms of elaboration.

A possible limitation of the present experiments concerns their generalizability. We used specific instructions to implement impression motivation and a priming procedure to motivate participants to be accurate. The generation of new arguments may well be a direct result of the instruction to persuade another participant. Also, the attitude topic used in the present research is one that was reasonably familiar to most participants, such that new arguments would have been available to them if they were needed for creative processing. It would be interesting to establish what would happen if a relatively new and unfamiliar topic was used. We recognize the need for further research using other settings and topics before it is possible to conclude that high impression motivation consistently leads to creative elaboration or other processes that may undermine the effects of varying argument quality.

To summarize, our findings show that intermediate levels of impression motivation lead to elaboration of message arguments and that high levels of impression motivation foster what we called creative processing, which entails drawing on arguments outside the persuasive communication. However, this pattern of results only occurred when individuals also were motivated to hold valid attitudes. When accuracy concerns are lower, a high level of impression motivation is needed for individuals to elaborate message arguments. Further research is needed to establish whether creative processing is limited to contexts in which message recipients anticipate having to deliver their own persuasive communication.

NOTES

1. In previous research, this transmitter instruction was found to have no influence on participants’ motivation to elaborate (Nienhuis, 1998). This lack of influence was explained by suggesting that without additional motivational factors, participants simply recycled the arguments provided in the message and did not attend closely to their content.

2. In the Netherlands, this is a topic of social and political debate. The pretest mean indicated that the proposal to legalize hard drugs is not strongly counterattitudinal for Dutch students.
3. Participants in the low impression conditions were not asked this question. We were concerned that a further question concerning evaluation would raise their suspicions.

4. Of the remaining participants in the intermediate impression motivation condition, 29.2% also expected to be evaluated by the experimenter, and only 8.3% indicated that nobody would evaluate them. Of the remaining participants in the high impression motivation condition, 16.7% expected to be evaluated by the other participant and the experimenter and only 4.2% indicated that only the other participant would evaluate them.

5. No main effects or interaction effects were found when the total number of thoughts listed was entered into an analysis of variance.

6. Six participants (evenly distributed across cells) failed to conform to the instructions and instead wrote down arguments that were against the position advocated or did not write down any arguments at all.

7. A further 18.5% of the participants in the intermediate impression motivation condition also expected to be evaluated by the experimenter, and the remaining 7.4% were equally distributed among the other options. A further 3.6% of the participants in the high impression motivation condition also expected to be evaluated by the experimenter in addition to the other 3 persons, 10.7% expected to be evaluated by the other participant and the experimenter, and only 3.6% indicated that only the other participant would evaluate them.

8. A further 9.1% of the participants in the intermediate impression motivation condition also expected to be evaluated by the experimenter, and only 2.3% indicated that nobody would evaluate them. The remaining participants in the high impression motivation condition were equally divided among the alternatives, ranging from 1 person to 4 persons.

9. No main effects or interaction effects were found when the total number of thoughts listed was entered into an analysis of variance.

10. Twenty participants (75% of these participants had received weak arguments) failed to conform to the instructions and instead wrote down arguments that were against the position advocated or did not write down any arguments at all.

11. Due to a technical fault, the reading time data of 1 participant were not properly recorded, resulting in the exclusion of this participant from the reading time data analysis.

REFERENCES


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