

Sensitivity to Ulterior Motives in Retail Settings:  
The Moderating Role of Dual-Identity versus Sole-Identity Consumers

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## Sensitivity to Ulterior Motives in Retail Settings:

### The Moderating Role of Dual-Identity versus Sole-Identity Consumers

“10 psychological retail tricks that make you spend more money” ~ MarketWatch

“Protect Yourself from Used-Car Sales Tactics” ~ Consumer Reports

“Want Some Bling? Learn Sneaky Tricks of the Jewelry Trade” ~ AOL Finance

These headlines all highlight the lay belief that consumers need to be vigilant against potentially manipulative tactics in retail contexts and other persuasive settings. Such reminders of unscrupulous behavior in consumption settings can lead to consumer uncertainty, doubt, and skepticism (Bell and Main 2011; Darke and Ritchie 2007). However, not all marketplace encounters are manipulative, and it is pertinent to understand the conditions under which individuals can accurately detect when a persuasive agent has low versus high ulterior motives. In this respect, people who work or have worked in retail sales may have insight that other consumers do not. How might one’s experience as a retail agent facilitate interpretation of and response to persuasive attempts that occur in retail settings? It is noteworthy that employment in the retail industry is one of the most common jobs in the United States (American Jobs 2015), accounting for more than 4 million individuals. Thus, one compelling question is whether those who have previous sales agent experience respond differently to persuasion attempts than those without such experience.

Consider the example of Caitlin Kelly, who spent two years working in the retail industry and published a book about her experience entitled *Malled: My Unintentional Career in Retail* (2012). She discusses how her retail work experience changed her perceptions of shopping and sales staff. In a blog discussion about the book, the question came up of “Have you changed as a consumer?” to which she replied, “As a shopper, I’m also much nicer to associates. I’m much more aware of how hard they work. But I’m much less tolerant of bad service...” (Fottell 2014).

In our research, individuals with retail agent experience are referred to as dual-identity consumers (i.e., those who hold both the identity of being a persuasive agent and a consumer in retail contexts), while individuals without such experience are referred to as sole-identity consumers (i.e., those who hold only the identity of being a consumer in retail contexts). We compare dual- and sole-identity individuals in their responses to persuasion attempts that occur in ways that cue the customer about whether the sales agent has low or high ulterior motives. The first assumption of this research is that dual-identity consumers have two identities relevant to retail contexts—an agent identity and a consumer identity—while sole-identity consumers hold only the identity of being a consumer. We further suggest that, for dual-identity consumers, their agent identity automatically becomes salient in sales contexts, which we demonstrate in a pretest to see if the retail context brings to mind the identity of a retail “employee” for dual-identity consumers. Pretest participants were presented with four retail-oriented pictures (shopping bags, shopping mall, men’s clothing store, and women’s clothing store) or four non-retail-oriented pictures (park, church, sports arena, and library) to prime the retail versus non-retail contexts, respectively. For those with dual identities (i.e., those who have agent experience), the contextual priming of retail as opposed to non-retail settings led to greater activation of the “employee” identity (see pilot study in Appendix 1).

Importantly, we make the novel prediction that dual-identity and sole-identity consumers respond differently to persuasion attempts. We argue that in sales contexts where the agent identity of dual-identity consumers is activated, these consumers are more inclined to understand the persuasion context accurately and take the perspective of the other sales agent in the interaction, leading them to be particularly sensitive to informative contextual nuances. We further anticipate that sole-identity consumers are unable to naturally adopt the perspective of the

sales agent and are more likely to take a defensive stance when processing persuasive messages (DePaulo and DePaulo 1989). This defensive processing style will, in turn, lead sole-identity consumers to be less sensitive to nuances in the persuasion context—a response consistent with the widespread assumption that many persuasion attempts are manipulative (Main, Dahl, and Darke 2007). However, we expect that sole-identity consumers can become sensitive to the presence or absence of ulterior motives during persuasion attempts if they are able to take the perspective of the sales agent.

The current research makes a number of contributions to the literature. Notably, it identifies the importance of an often-overlooked aspect of identity related to whether the individual has worked a retail sales agent. This work builds upon past research demonstrating that consumers often automatically exhibit defensive processing in response to influence attempts (Main et al. 2007). We provide the first empirical examination of a novel moderator of this classic finding—whether one’s identity as a retail sales agent or a consumer is activated. While individuals with their consumer identity activated react defensively to persuasion attempts regardless of cues that signal the potential presence of ulterior motives, those with an activated agent identity are more discerning in terms of detecting cues that distinguish between low and high ulterior motives. Because of this, dual-identity individuals are better able to accurately discern when a persuasive sales agent is using tactics that may be manipulative.

Second, we build upon the persuasion-knowledge literature (Darke and Ritchie 2007; Friestad and Wright 1994; Main et al. 2007) to demonstrate that the identity activated in a given context can affect the individual’s defensive motivations. A key theoretical implication of the current work is the role of perspective-taking, which we view as being a component of the process underlying the effects observed. In particular, we propose that dual-identity consumers’

ability to take the perspective of the persuasive agent makes them more likely to accurately assess the situation and exhibit appropriate responses to cues signaling high or low ulterior motives. Moreover, we propose that encouraging perspective-taking (e.g., via an experimental manipulation) can mitigate sole-identity consumers' negative, defense-motivated responses in contexts with low ulterior motives. This finding adds to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) by highlighting one of the conditions under which consumers are more open to persuasion attempts that are not linked to ulterior motives.

## THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

### *Persuasion Knowledge and Ulterior Motives*

According to the PKM, individuals' reactions to persuasion attempts depend on their persuasion knowledge and perceptions of the persuasive agent's intentions (Friestad and Wright 1994). Perceptions of ulterior motives are high when the persuasive agent's actions are perceived to be inauthentic or driven by self-serving intentions (DeCarlo 2005). Past research shows that while the context can make the presence of ulterior motives more or less salient, some targets can be insensitive to such cues (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Fein 1996). In particular, work on the *sinister attribution error* shows that persuasion targets can be insensitive to information indicating that the persuasive agent does not necessarily have ulterior motives, and these individuals respond uniformly to persuasion attempts regardless of whether or not the situation signals that ulterior motives are present (Main et al. 2007). In other words, consumers are often defense-motivated and view persuasive agents with suspicion and distrust (Kramer 1994; Main et al. 2007). Defense-motivated processing is a closed-minded form of processing wherein the individual wishes to defend and protect the self from being manipulated or fooled by a

persuasive agent (Chen and Chaiken 1999; Darke and Ritchie 2007).

Some individuals who are exposed to persuasive attempts in retail contexts have work experience as an agent/salesperson. They hold dual identities (i.e. being or having been a persuasive agent and the identity of being a consumer). Either of which can be activated in a consumption context. In contrast, some consumers have no experience as sales agents, holding a singular identity that is activated in consumption contexts—the consumer identity. Interestingly, the PKM proposes that individuals can fluidly move back and forth between their identities as agent and consumer (Friestad and Wright 1994). Despite this proposition, research to date has not explicitly examined the consequences of the notion that people can have both agent and consumer identities. Existing work largely focuses on understanding how persuasion knowledge changes the way that consumers interpret information encountered in the marketplace (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Hardesty, Bearden, and Carlson 2007; Morales 2005; Wei, Fischer, and Main 2008), or on the antecedents of persuasion-knowledge tactics (Pillai and Kumar 2012). We look at an individual difference—sole versus dual identity—that moderates reactions to persuasive attempts. This omission from the existing literature means that research has overlooked the role that the activation of a retail agent identity may have on dual-identity consumers' responses to persuasion attempts. We posit that dual-identity consumers with an activated agent identity (vs. consumer identity) will adjust their perceptions of the sales agent based on information suggesting that the sales agent is more (or less) likely to be acting based on ulterior motives. We further propose that the focal reason why consumers with an agent identity activated are more sensitive to the degree of ulterior motives is because they are better able to take the perspective of the persuasive agent and thus are more aware of contextual cues.

*Dual-Identity Individuals and Perspective-Taking*

Past research suggests that while individuals have chronically accessible aspects of their identity (Oyserman 2009), different aspects of identity can be activated by elements of the decision context (e.g., Deshpandé and Stayman 1994; Forehand and Deshpandé 2001; LeBoeuf, Shafir, and Belyavsky 2007; White and Dahl 2007). Each identity that an individual holds is associated with different behavioral demands and expectations (Grover and Hui 1994). The salience of a particular identity can influence individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Forehand, Deshpandé, and Reed II 2002). For individuals holding the dual identities of "student" and "athlete," for example, the salience of the athlete identity may be associated with poor academic performance (Settles, Sellers, and Damas 2002). Indeed, research supports the notion that a salient identity dominates working memory at a given point in time (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003) and is more likely to affect downstream behaviors than an identity that is not salient (Burke 1980).

The current research aims to compare how dual-identity versus sole-identity individuals respond to cues suggesting that a persuasive agent has ulterior motives. It is likely that when the agent identity is salient, the individual will tend to take on the perspective of a "past actor" in a retail context, thereby taking into account situational nuances and pressures under which a sales agent works. Perspective-taking involves the active consideration of alternative points of view (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000; Laurent and Myers 2011) and can lead to an increased ability to interpret and scrutinize interpersonal interactions (Galinsky et al. 2008) and to decreased stereotypical reactions (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000). Because of this, dual-identity consumers with an activated agent identity are likely to engage in less defensive processing and to be more accurate in assessing the level of ulterior motives associated with influence attempts in the marketplace. As such, dual-identity consumers with a salient agent identity tend to be sensitive to

contextual information indicating whether the persuasive agent has low or high ulterior motives.

In contrast, sole-identity consumers are predicted to be less able to take the perspective of a persuasive agent. This prediction is drawn in part from research examining the fundamental attribution error (Kelley and Michela 1980) or correspondence bias (Jones and Davis 1965), wherein individuals do not fully account for external factors that may influence another's behavior and, as a result, overestimate the influence of internal dispositions in determining the causes of another person's behavior. The default response on the part of sole-identity consumers is to rely on negative stereotypical views of persuasive agents, rather than attend to cues in the actual context (Babin, Boles, and Darden 1995). When consumers' negative stereotype is activated, they become defensive in how they process subsequent information (Darke and Ritchie 2007). Accordingly, we suggest that sole-identity consumers are less likely to accurately interpret the behavior of a persuasive agent in the marketplace or to detect situational nuances implying that ulterior motives are low (vs. high).

In sum, we predict that dual-identity consumers will be able to discern when the persuasive agent has high ulterior motives and will exhibit more positive reactions when ulterior motives are low as opposed to high. On the other hand, sole-identity consumers will be less able to detect such cues in the environment and will exhibit similar reactions regardless of the level of ulterior motives. Our first key prediction is that an interaction between identity and perception of ulterior motives will emerge such that:

H1a: Dual-identity consumers will have more favorable responses to persuasion attempts that are characterized by low as opposed to high ulterior motives.

H1b: Sole-identity consumers will respond negatively to persuasion attempts regardless of the level of ulterior motives.

### *The Influence of Perspective-Taking on Sole-Identity Consumers*

Given that in our conceptualization one of the key differences between dual-identity and sole-identity consumers is the ability of the former to perspective-take in retail contexts, we suggest that one way to reduce the negative responses to persuasive agents on the part of sole-identity consumers (who do not naturally attend to cues implying low vs. high ulterior motives) might be to encourage them to engage in perspective-taking. This refers to the cognitive capacity to consider situations from the viewpoint of another individual (Galinsky et al. 2008). Past research shows that perspective-taking leads to the consideration of contextual elements and related factors, which then results in decreased defensive stereotyping (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000; Todd, Galinsky, and Bodenhausen 2012).

Drawing on this existing work, we propose that the encouragement of perspective-taking might allow sole-identity consumers to better understand the view of the persuasive agent, to attend to contextual nuances in the situation, and to be more accurate in responding to varying levels of ulterior motives. Such perspective-taking may lead sole-identity consumers to report a decrease in defensive thoughts in response to persuasion attempts that are not associated with high ulterior motives. In particular,

H2a: Under conditions of perspective-taking, sole-identity consumers will exhibit more positive reactions when persuasion attempts are low (vs. high) in ulterior-motive cues.

H2b: When perspective-taking is absent, sole-identity consumers will exhibit more negative reactions regardless of the persuasion attempt being low (vs. high) in ulterior motives.

Meanwhile, dual-identity consumers will have similar response patterns with or without perspective-taking. That is,

H2c: Dual-identity consumers will have more favorable responses to a persuasion attempt

with low as opposed to high ulterior motives regardless of perspective-taking.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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Our theoretical model is depicted in Figure 1. We conducted four experiments to test our predictions. Across the studies we tested different downstream consequences. Studies 1 and 2 were designed to examine H1a and H1b. In Study 1, we used a field study to determine if those with sales agent experience are differentially affected by cues suggesting potential ulterior motives compared to sole-identity consumers. In Study 2, we employed a lab-based scenario that varied ulterior-motive cues to investigate how dual-identity consumers respond when either their consumer or agent identity is activated. As a follow-up to Study 2, we present a preliminary examination that explored the underlying process by testing the serial mediating effect of perspective-taking and defensive thoughts. Study 3 looked at the moderating effect of perspective-taking and the mediating role of defensive thoughts. Study 4 examined the proposed model by using real purchasing behavior (money spent) as the key dependent measure.

### **STUDY 1**

The goal of the first study was to provide a preliminary demonstration of the proposed effects of ulterior motives and retail identity (H1a and H1b) in a field setting. We operationalized identity by comparing dual-identity consumers (i.e., who have both sales agent experience and consumer experience) to sole-identity consumers (i.e., who have no agent experience). Thus, in this study, identity was operationalized as an individual difference variable indicating whether a participant had agent experience (dual-identity consumer) or not (sole-identity consumer).

Passersby were offered the opportunity to sample products at a booth, and ulterior motives were operationalized as whether participants were informed that the persuasive agent worked for the company or was an independent student researcher. For dependent variables, we were interested in both an objective (time spent interacting with the agent) and subjective measure (the agent's perceptions of the friendliness of the customer).

## Method

Study 1 utilized a 2 (ulterior motives: low vs. high)  $\times$  2 (identity: sole vs. dual) between-participants design ( $N = 84$ , average age = 21.48, 40% female, 48.6% had experience as an agent with an average of 23 months of experience). A sampling table was set up close to the main entrance of the business school at a North American university, staffed by a male research assistant posing as a representative of a chocolate company. The table featured different kinds of chocolates for participants to sample. Consistent with the cover story that the company was test-marketing some new flavors of chocolate, the samples were varieties likely to be unfamiliar to participants. When individuals passed by the table, the representative invited them to try a sample. The ulterior motive was manipulated by indicating either (a) that he worked as a consultant for the company that produced the chocolate (high ulterior motives), or (b) that he worked as a student research assistant at the university (low ulterior motives). A pretest of our ulterior-motive manipulation with a different sample of participants was conducted to confirm its effectiveness by asking participants: "Is it likely the person with the samples tried to sell something?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much so*). Participants were more likely to believe that the persuasive agent was trying to sell something when the agent was introduced as working for the company (i.e. high ulterior motives) versus as a researcher (e.g. low ulterior motives) ( $M_{\text{worker}} = 5.48$  vs.  $M_{\text{researcher}} = 3.41$ ;  $F(1, 28) = 25.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

After this introductory statement, the representative offered the samples to the respondent. Once participants were done sampling, they completed a short survey consistent with the cover story. Embedded at the end of this survey was an item asking if the respondent had experience as a sales agent or not. (“Have you worked as a salesclerk before and if so, please indicate length of work experience.”) We operationalized identity as an individual difference based on whether participants reported previous agent experience or not (i.e., dual-identity consumers vs. sole-identity consumers). The questionnaire contained other measures not reported, as they were for exploratory purposes or as part of the cover story, this is true in all studies (see online appendix). Unbeknownst to participants, there was an unobtrusive observer who recorded the interaction time (in minutes) starting from when the representative explained his role. The representative (research assistant) also recorded his perceptions of the participant’s friendliness (1 = *not friendly at all*, 5 = *very friendly*) after the interaction concluded. Both the research assistant and observer were blind to the identity conditions and hypotheses.

## Results

*Time spent interacting with the agent.* Results revealed a significant main effect of ulterior motives ( $F(1, 80) = 4.68, p = .03$ ) and a significant interaction between ulterior motives and identity on time spent with the persuasive agent ( $F(1, 80) = 5.40, p = .02$ ). Planned contrasts supported H1a and H1b, indicating that dual-identity participants interacted with the persuasive agent for a longer duration when ulterior motives were low versus high ( $M_{\text{low}} = 3.69\text{m}, SD = 0.83\text{m}$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = 2.83\text{m}, SD = 0.93\text{m}; F(1, 80) = 7.72, p < .01$ , see Figure 2); for sole-identity consumers, the time spent interacting with the persuasive agent did not differ based on ulterior motives ( $M_{\text{low}} = 3.10\text{m}, SD = 0.89\text{m}$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.13\text{m}, SD = 0.94\text{m}, F < 1, \text{ns}$ ). Under low ulterior motives, dual-identity consumers spent a longer time than did sole-identity consumers

( $M = 3.69m$  vs.  $M = 3.10m$ ;  $F(1, 80) = 4.81, p = .03$ ). However, under high ulterior motives, there was no significant difference between dual- and sole-identity consumers in time spent ( $M = 2.83m$  vs.  $M = 3.13m$ ;  $F < 1, ns$ ).

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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*Sales agent's perceptions of friendliness.* Results of a  $2 \times 2$  ANOVA revealed a marginally significant main effect of ulterior motives ( $F(1, 80) = 3.24, p = .07$ ) and a significant interaction ( $F(1, 80) = 4.24, p = .04$ ), as shown in Figure 3. Planned contrasts supported H1a and indicated that for participants with a dual identity, perceived friendliness was higher when ulterior motives were low as compared to high ( $M_{low} = 3.91, SD = 1.01$  vs.  $M_{high} = 3.20, SD = .62$ ;  $F(1, 80) = 5.27, p = .02$ ). For sole-identity participants, perceived friendliness did not differ based on ulterior motives ( $M_{low} = 3.33, SD = .86$  vs.  $M_{high} = 3.38, SD = .81$ ;  $F < 1, ns$ ), supporting H1b. Under low ulterior motives, perceived friendliness was marginally higher for dual-identity consumers than for sole-identity consumers ( $M = 3.91$  vs.  $M = 3.33$ ;  $F(1, 80) = 3.56, p = .06$ ). However, under high ulterior motives, there was no significant difference between dual- and sole-identity consumers ( $M = 3.20$  vs.  $M = 3.38$ ;  $F < 1, ns$ ).

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Insert Figure 3 about here

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## Discussion

The results of Study 1 demonstrate that dual-identity consumers were perceived to be friendlier and actually spent more time interacting with the persuasive agent when ulterior

motives were low as compared to high. In contrast, sole-identity consumers showed no differences in perceived friendliness or time spent interacting with the persuasive agent as a function of ulterior motives. In other words, while dual-identity consumers seemed to respond appropriately to the contextual cues suggesting that the sales representative did or did not have ulterior motives, sole-identity consumers were insensitive to the differing levels of ulterior motives. Using both objective and subjective measures (interaction time and perceived friendliness), we provide evidence for differing responses of dual- and sole-identity consumers to persuasion attempts with varying ulterior motives. In the next studies, we examine other consumer responses such as future interaction intentions and actual purchase behavior.

## **STUDY 2**

One drawback of Study 1 is that it was conducted in a field setting, which led to less experimental control. In Study 2, we provide further evidence for H1a and H1b utilizing a more controlled experiment in a lab setting. Identity was again operationalized as an individual difference indicating whether or not the participant had prior sales experience. In this study, we also wished to better understand the nature of the dual-identity consumers. To do this, we randomly assigned dual-identity consumers to conditions that would foster the activation of either their consumer or agent identity, or neither. Thus, we included three types of individuals to compare against natural dual-identity consumers (no identity activated): 1) dual-identity participants with the agent role primed (agent identity activated), 2) dual-identity participants with the consumer role primed (consumer identity activated), and 3) sole-identity consumers with no identity priming.

To gather more evidence that our effects are due to the agent identity that is activated, we

intend to show that dual-identity participants primed with their agent identity will behave similarly to dual-identity participants who do not explicitly have their agent identity activated; and that dual-identity participants primed with their consumer identity will behave like sole-identity consumers and be insensitive to information regarding low or high ulterior motives. This study examines the interaction between identity and ulterior motives on the desire for future interactions with the agent.

## Method

*Procedure.* This study used a 2 (ulterior motives: low vs. high)  $\times$  4 (identity: sole-identity consumer, dual-identity/no identity activated, dual-identity/agent identity activated, dual-identity/consumer identity activated) between-participants design (N = 161, average age = 21.09, 48% female undergraduate students), with a portion of participants who self-identified as having prior experience as an agent (with 2.03 average years of agent experience). Among those dual-identity participants, one third were randomly assigned to be primed with their agent identity by asking them to list five things that they usually did while working as a sales associate (agent identity activated). An additional third of the agents were primed with the consumer role by asking them to list five things that they usually did while shopping as a consumer (consumer identity activated). The remaining third of dual-identity participants was not primed (no identity activated). Participants then read a retail scenario describing a situation in which they were to imagine themselves shopping for sunglasses. We used a previously validated manipulation of ulterior motives that occurred through the timing of the persuasion attempt (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Main et al. 2007). In the high ulterior-motives condition, participants were asked to imagine that they wanted to buy a pair of sunglasses, and the sales agent made flattering statements before purchase. In the low ulterior-motives condition, the sales agent made flattering

statements after the purchase was concluded (see Appendix 2 for scenario).

*Measures.* Based on Ramsey and Sohi (1997), future interaction intentions were measured with three items: “It is possible that I will contact this salesclerk again,” “I am willing to deal with this salesclerk again,” and “I plan to continue interacting with this salesclerk” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .74$ ). The question to check the manipulation of ulterior-motives manipulation was the same as that used in Study 1.

## Results

*Manipulation check.* Results of a 2 (ulterior motives)  $\times$  4 (identity) ANOVA showed only a significant main effect of ulterior motives on the manipulation check for ulterior motives. In particular, participants in the high ulterior-motives condition were more likely to indicate that the sales agent tried to influence their purchase ( $M = 5.59$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ) than were those in the low ulterior-motives condition ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ;  $F(1, 153) = 32.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Future interaction intentions.* A 2 (ulterior motives)  $\times$  4 (identity) ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of ulterior motives ( $M_{\text{low}} = 3.86$ ,  $SD = 1.07$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ;  $F(1, 153) = 6.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and a significant interaction between ulterior motives and identity on future interaction intentions ( $F(1, 153) = 3.03$ ,  $p < .05$ ; refer to Figure 4). Planned contrasts indicated the following results of each identity under conditions of low versus high ulterior motives. Dual-identity participants with no identity activated exhibited significantly higher future interaction intentions under low as compared to high ulterior motives ( $M_{(\text{low}, N = 20)} = 4.37$ ,  $SD = .86$  vs.  $M_{(\text{high}, N = 17)} = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ;  $F(1, 153) = 5.97$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Similarly, dual-identity participants with their agent identity activated showed significantly higher future interaction intentions in low, not high, ulterior-motive conditions ( $M_{(\text{low}, N = 19)} = 4.12$ ,  $SD = .77$  vs.  $M_{(\text{high}, N = 21)} = 3.14$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ;  $F(1, 153) = 8.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In contrast, dual-identity participants with their

consumer identity activated did not respond differently based on differing levels of ulterior motives ( $M_{(\text{low}, N = 18)} = 3.43, SD = 1.33$  vs.  $M_{(\text{high}, N = 22)} = 3.56, SD = .92; F(1, 153) = .16, p = .69$ ). And similarly, sole-identity consumers exhibited no differences in future interaction intentions across the low and high ulterior-motive conditions ( $M_{(\text{low}, N = 22)} = 3.53, SD = 1.01$  vs.  $M_{(\text{high}, N = 22)} = 3.57, SD = 1.12; F(1, 153) = .02, p = .87$ ).

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Insert Figure 4 about here

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## Discussion

The findings of Study 2 confirmed that dual-identity consumers' sales agent identity is naturally salient in shopping situations, given that dual-identity participants whose work identity was activated responded in a manner similar to those whose identity was not activated. In particular, dual-identity participants with no identity activated responded more positively to persuasion attempts where ulterior motives were low as opposed to high (H1a). This response pattern is similar to that of dual-identity participants with an activated agent identity, but different from that of dual-identity participants with an activated consumer identity. When the consumer identity is activated for dual-identity participants, they respond similarly to sole-identity consumers and do not differ in terms of future interaction intentions when ulterior motives are low versus high. The results are consistent with the view that when the agent identity is activated for dual-identity consumers, they are able to accurately interpret situational cues and are sensitive to nuances in the retail decision-making context. In contrast, sole-identity consumers (and dual-identity consumers with their consumer identity activated) tend to adopt a defensive processing style, and their responses do not vary as a function of ulterior motives (H1b). Study 2 provides additional evidence that dual-identity and sole-identity consumers are

different by examining behavioral intentions in the form of future interaction intentions. In the next study, we explore the underlying process for the observed effects in Studies 1 and 2.

As discussed earlier, we propose that the different responses of dual-identity and sole-identity consumers are due, at least in part, to perspective-taking, which can reduce defensive thoughts. While dual-identity consumers are naturally able to consider the situation from the agent's point of view, sole-identity consumers are not. To explore the underlying process of the different responses of dual- and sole-identity consumers in relation to purchase intentions, we conducted a preliminary pretest of our proposed model. We tested the path (dual- vs. sole-identity consumers → perspective-taking → defensive thoughts → purchase intentions) to compare the degree of natural perspective-taking between dual-identity consumers and sole-identity consumers in retail contexts. In this pretest, we provided participants ( $N = 290$  MTurk participants; average age = 35.38; female = 132; male = 158) with the sunglasses shopping scenario from Study 2, holding ulterior motives low. We asked participants to rate their agreement with the following three questions related to perspective-taking: "Before criticizing a salesclerk, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place," "I try to understand the salesclerk better by imagining how things look from their perspective," "When I am upset at a salesclerk or their behavior, I usually try to put myself in their shoes for a while" ( $\alpha = .91$ ). We measured purchase intentions by asking "To what extent would you purchase a pair of sunglasses from this store?" Finally, following a procedure by de Hoog (2013), defensive thoughts were measured by coding an open-ended thought listing. Two coders ( $\alpha = .87$ ) coded the defensive thoughts based on the number of negative thoughts. Some examples of negative thoughts would be: "annoyed by the salesclerk's interference," "The clerk really wanted to sell the sunglasses, and said it looked great even though it might not," and "I don't like pushy salespeople." An

average across coders was used to create the overall index of defensive thoughts. Higher values on the defensive-thoughts score indicate more defensive processing.

Results indicated that, as anticipated, dual-identity consumers ( $N = 163$ ) were significantly more likely to take the sales agent's perspective ( $M_{\text{dual}} = 5.45$  vs.  $M_{\text{sole}} = 5.12$ ;  $t(1, 288) = 1.94, p = .053$ ) and had higher purchase intentions ( $M_{\text{dual}} = 5.09$  vs.  $M_{\text{sole}} = 4.76$ ;  $t(1, 288) = 2.18, p < .05$ ) than did sole-identity consumers ( $N = 127$ ) when ulterior motives were low. We further conducted serial mediation analysis following Hayes' Process Model 6 (2015) by using perspective-taking and defensive thoughts as two serial mediators. The path (dual- vs. sole-identity consumers  $\rightarrow$  perspective-taking  $\rightarrow$  defensive thoughts  $\rightarrow$  purchase intentions) was significant (95% CI: -.0653, -.0011). While we propose the role of perspective-taking in explaining the difference between responses of dual- and sole-identity consumers, other possible factors might serve as alternative explanations.

According to the PKM (Friestad and Wright 1994), sales knowledge may be one additional explanation. In this study, we had three research assistants code for sales knowledge (e.g., "I think that the salesclerk is just doing their job," "Just the typical sales scenario at any retail outlet," etc.;  $\alpha = .70$ ) in the thought listings of the study, and we averaged the work of the three coders on sales knowledge into an index. We conducted Hayes' Process Model 6 by using sales knowledge and defensive thoughts as two serial mediators. The path (dual- vs. sole-identity consumers  $\rightarrow$  sales knowledge  $\rightarrow$  defensive thoughts  $\rightarrow$  purchase intentions) was not significant (95% CI: -.0166, .0310).

### STUDY 3

Given this demonstration of perspective-taking as an underlying process for the different responses of dual- and sole-identity consumers, in Study 3 we further explore its role by

manipulating perspective-taking. We use a similar manipulation of ulterior motives as in Study 2. Study 3 included two behavioral outcome measures: future interaction intentions and purchase intentions. In our pretest, dual-identity consumers were more likely to take the perspective of a sales agent than were sole-identity consumers. Drawing on this insight, we propose that a contextual manipulation of perspective-taking will moderate the effects such that sole-identity consumers who take the perspective of the persuasive agent will be more accurate in detecting and responding to variation in ulterior motives (H2a, H2b, and H2c). In Study 3 we wished to employ a manipulation of perspective-taking that is actionable in retail settings in order to increase the generalizability and managerial implications of our findings. In addition, we aimed to replicate the mediation findings illustrating the relationship between perspective-taking and defensive thoughts via moderation.

#### Method

*Sample and design.* This was a 2 (ulterior motives: low vs. high)  $\times$  2 (identity: sole-identity consumer, dual-identity)  $\times$  2 (perspective-taking: yes vs. no) between-participants design. Participants self-identified whether or not they had prior sales experience. The data were collected through MTurk. We excluded 51 participants from the data analysis who failed our attention check. There were 756 participants in total used for data analysis, with 375 dual-identity consumers and 381 sole-identity consumers (average age = 36.33; male = 356; female = 399; one participant did not indicate their gender).

*Procedure and manipulation.* The manipulation of ulterior motives was the same as in Study 2, through the timing of the persuasion attempt. In addition, a retail-oriented perspective-taking manipulation was developed. This manipulation attempted to focus on customers' interaction with store employees. In the perspective-taking condition, participants read the

following message:

Imagine that you've gone to a store to buy a hat that you were planning to buy for a while now. When you enter the store, there is a sign near the entrance that says: "Employee Spotlight!" Underneath the title, it says: "This week we are spotlighting one of our employees, Pat, and wanted to present their point of view. In Pat's job as a sales clerk here, Pat has a number of things that need to be done in the day!" The poster goes on to say: "We would like to encourage our clients to think about how they would feel in Pat's place and to think about things from Pat's perspective. Take a walk in Pat's shoes today and ask Pat about her day!"

In the no-perspective-taking condition, participants were not provided the above message.

*Measures.* Future interaction intentions ( $\alpha = .86$ ) were measured with the same items as in Study 2. Defensive thoughts were coded the same as in the preliminary study, by two coders ( $\alpha = .81$ ). As a manipulation check for perspective-taking, we asked participants: "To what extent do you try to think and feel from the salesclerk's perspective?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The manipulation-check item for ulterior motives was: "I thought the primary goal of the salesclerk was to make a sale" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). We also measured purchase intentions with the same item as in Study 2.

## Results

*Manipulation checks.* An independent-samples t-test indicated that participants in the high ulterior-motive condition were more likely to report that the salesperson tried to make a sale ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.56$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) than were those in the low ulterior-motive condition ( $M_{\text{low}} = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ;  $t(1, 754) = -3.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Participants in the perspective-taking condition were more likely to take the salesperson's view ( $M_{\text{taking}} = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ) than were those in the no-perspective-

taking condition ( $M_{\text{no-taking}} = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ;  $t(1, 754) = -12.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*Future interaction intentions.* We predicted that dual-identity consumers would have similar response patterns to low and high ulterior motives regardless of perspective-taking (H2c). Importantly, we expected that sole-identity consumers would have different response patterns to low versus high ulterior motives with perspective-taking versus without perspective-taking (H2a and H2b). We first conducted a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  univariate ANOVA on future interaction intentions. The results did not yield a significant three-way interaction among ulterior motives, identity, and perspective-taking on future interaction intentions ( $F(1, 748) = 2.29$ ,  $p = .13$ ; Figure 5). Dawson and Richter (2006) observe that although interaction significance is a useful means for illustration purposes, further statistical probing tests (e.g., simple effect test) can be an accurate and useful tool that allows researchers to explore undetected differences between pairs. Before taking this step, however, we note that what does emerge here, as we expected, is a significant 2-way interaction between ulterior motives and perspective-taking on future interaction intentions for sole-identity consumers ( $F(1, 748) = 4.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

We further calculated simple effects for sole- and dual-identity consumers separately. Consistent with H2a and H2b, planned contrasts indicated that in the perspective-taking condition, sole-identity consumers had higher future interaction intentions when ulterior motives were low as compared to high ( $M_{\text{low}} = 4.92$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.29$ ;  $F(1, 748) = 10.67$ ,  $p < .05$ ); in the no-perspective-taking condition, ulterior motives (low vs. high) had no influence on future interaction intentions ( $M_{\text{low}} = 4.49$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.43$ ;  $F(1, 748) = .10$ ,  $p = .75$ ). We then conducted simple effects analysis for dual-identity consumers, which showed that they responded with significantly higher future interaction intentions when ulterior motives were low as compared to high, both with perspective-taking ( $M_{\text{low}} = 5.10$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.55$ ;  $F(1, 748) = 7.77$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and

without perspective-taking ( $M_{\text{low}} = 5.25$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.68$ ;  $F(1, 748) = 8.26, p < .05$ ), supporting H2c.

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Insert Figure 5 about here

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Finally, we conducted a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  univariate ANOVA on purchase intentions. There was no three-way interaction ( $F(1, 748) = 1.85, p = .17$ ). For sole-identity consumers, the two-way interaction between ulterior motives and perspective-taking on purchase intentions was also not significant ( $F(1, 748) = 4.26, p = .54$ ).

*Defensive thoughts.* A  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  univariate ANOVA revealed a non-significant three-way interaction on defensive thoughts ( $F(1, 748) = 2.63, p = .11$ ). However, for sole-identity consumers, there was a significant interaction between perspective-taking and ulterior motives on defensive thoughts ( $F(1, 748) = 4.57, p < .05$ ). Simple effects analysis indicated that sole-identity consumers in the perspective-taking condition had fewer negative thoughts when ulterior motives were low than when they were high ( $M_{\text{low}} = .43$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = .94$ ;  $F(1, 748) = 24.88, p < .01$ ). For sole-identity consumers in the no-perspective-taking condition, ulterior motives (low vs. high) had no influence on the number of defensive thoughts reported ( $M_{\text{low}} = .91$  vs.  $M_{\text{high}} = .04$ ;  $F < 1, ns$ ). The defensive thoughts were reflected through the number of participants' negative thoughts based on de Hoog (2013). We also tried to include the total number of participants' thoughts in the analysis through a new formula of defensive thoughts. We first calculated the proportion of the number of negative thoughts over the total number of thoughts for each participant. Then the new index of defensive thoughts was the average of two coders' proportion. This analysis was not significant but was in the expected direction (e.g., under

perspective-taking, sole-identity consumers had fewer defensive thoughts with low vs. high ulterior motives:  $M_{low} = .12$  vs.  $M_{high} = .26$ ).

*Moderated mediation analysis.* We first ran Hayes' (2015) moderated mediation analysis Model 11 with X=ulterior motives, W=identity, and Z=perspective-taking. However, the index of moderated mediation was not significant (95% CI: -.7385, .0525). We then ran Hayes' (2015) moderated mediation analysis Model 7 for dual-identity consumers and sole-identity consumers separately, given our predictions were for sole-identity consumers under conditions of perspective-taking. The results showed non-significant moderated mediation for dual-identity consumers (95% CI: -.2578, .3114) and significant moderated mediation for sole-identity consumers (95% CI: -.6029, -.0282). For sole-identity consumers, there was a significant interaction between ulterior motives and perspective-taking on defensive thoughts (95% CI: .0349, .8374;  $\beta = .44$ ). Defensive thoughts were negatively correlated to future interaction intentions (95% CI: -.8303, -.5991;  $\beta = -.71$ ). Further, the indirect effect showed that when perspective-taking occurred, the path (ulterior motives  $\rightarrow$  defensive thoughts  $\rightarrow$  future interaction intentions) for sole-identity consumers was significant (95% CI: -.5736, -.1771;  $\beta = -.37$ ). When perspective-taking did not occur, the path was non-significant (95% CI: -.2817, .1634;  $\beta = -.05$ ).

## Discussion

The results of Study 3 confirm H2a, H2b, and H2c using a retail-oriented manipulation of perspective-taking. As anticipated, the manipulation of perspective-taking had an effect only on sole-identity consumers. Specifically, perspective-taking decreased sole-identity consumers' defensive thoughts and, in turn, increased future interaction intentions. On the other hand, dual-identity consumers responded similarly to low versus high ulterior motives regardless of

perspective-taking, presumably because they are already naturally able to engage in perspective-taking in retail contexts. Somewhat surprisingly, the effect of perspective-taking was not observed on purchase intentions. One reason why the effect did not occur might have been the product category (e.g., hat), perhaps this is an uncommon purchase item. In the next study, we examine the effect of perspective-taking on consumers in a real purchasing context through comparing actual money spent with or without perspective-taking.

#### STUDY 4

In this final study, we wanted to utilize another retail-oriented manipulation of perspective-taking and to examine actual purchase behavior as our key dependent measure. We once again operationalized identity by comparing individuals with sales agent experience (dual-identity consumers) to individuals who have no agent experience (sole-identity consumers). In this study, we held ulterior motives constant as low. For our dependent variable, we were interested in an objective measure of money spent on products.

##### Method

*Design.* This study utilized a 2 (perspective-taking: no vs. yes)  $\times$  2 (identity: sole-identity vs. dual-identity consumer) between-participants design with ulterior motives low across all four conditions. Participants were recruited individually to take part in a study in the research lab of a large North American university and were paid \$10. Once participants entered the lab, they read the consent form and were told that they were going to evaluate some consumer products and make a purchase.

Prior to going shopping, participants completed an initial questionnaire asking for some basic demographic information. Embedded at the end of this questionnaire was an item asking if

the respondent had experience as a sales agent or not. We operationalized identity as an individual difference based on whether or not participants reported previous agent experience (i.e., dual-identity consumers vs. sole-identity consumers).

*Manipulation of perspective-taking.* Once participants had completed their answers to these initial questions, they were given fictitious information about a company prior to viewing the items for sale. Participants were informed that the company was interested in taking ordinary items and making them intriguing and enjoyable to use. They were further told that the company's products are sold in shops all over the world, and they were shown a flyer showcasing some of the items. The top of the flyer read, "Check out the new items," and in the center was a sample of the items available for sale in the retail store we set up. There were 6 photos of the available items. At the bottom of the flyer was the perspective-taking manipulation. For half of the participants, the flyer encouraged perspective-taking: "Soon we will spotlight a clerk of ours and present their point of view. Think about how you would feel in the place of one of our clerks and consider things from their perspective. Take a walk in our salesclerk's shoes today." The other half of the participants (no-perspective-taking condition) were presented with the flyer without the perspective-taking message.

*Procedure.* After the manipulation of perspective-taking, participants were told that we were interested in having them evaluate some new products from the featured company, and they were asked to raise their hand to let the experimenter know when they were ready to see the products. To make this more realistic, we informed participants that we would give them \$5 to spend on the products that are available, and that they get to keep the item(s) chosen and any change that remains (in addition to the \$10 for being in the study).

Participants were given their \$5 and were led to the store, where a research assistant was

situated behind the table with the products for sale. She greeted participants by saying, “Hi, is there anything in particular you are looking for?” On the table in front of her were numerous items for sale, labeled with their prices, which varied from .25 (for erasers) to \$3 (for a flashlight). Other items for sale included tweezers, nail brushes, pencils, pens, magnifying glasses, post-it notes in unusual shapes (i.e., a tree ring or matchbook), levels, and magnetic bookmarks.

Participants could spend as little or as much of their money and time shopping as they desired. After making their purchase, they were given any change required, their purchase was put in a bag, and they were thanked and returned to the room with the experimenter to complete the final questionnaire. The manipulation check for perspective-taking asked participants to indicate the extent to which they were requested to consider the salesperson’s point of view in the flyer (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The main dependent variable was amount spent (.25 to 5.00 range,  $M = \$2.41$ ).

## Results and Discussion

*Manipulation check.* Before data analysis, we excluded eight participants that the research assistant knew. This left 190 participants in total for further analysis (average age = 20.6; 52% female; 50% had experience as an agent). An independent-samples t-test was run on the perspective-taking manipulation item since there was only one manipulated variable. Results were significant, indicating that those in the perspective-taking condition were more likely to take the salesperson’s point of view ( $M = 4.78$ ) compared to those not engaged in perspective-taking ( $M = 2.94$ ,  $t(188) = -7.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, to confirm that ulterior motives were low across all conditions, we included the following two items: “The person you interacted with and made a purchase from was (1 = *not trying to influence my purchasing*, 7 = *trying to influence my*

*purchasing; M = 1.97*)” and “The person you interacted with and made a purchase from was trying hard to make a sale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; *M = 2.13*).” We then conducted an Independent-samples t-test comparing responses to the mean of the scale, which is 4, and both scale items were significant ( $t(188) = -2.051, p < .001$  and  $t(188) = -1.89, p < .001$ ). This result confirmed that ulterior motives were perceived as low across all conditions.

*Tests of hypotheses.* We conducted a two-way ANOVA on money spent. The result did not show a significant interaction between identity and perspective-taking on money spent ( $F(1, 186) = 2.56, p = .11$ ), as shown in Figure 6. Recall that the effect of perspective-taking was expected to occur only for sole-identity consumers, and not for dual-identity consumers. As predicted, for sole-identity consumers there was a marginally significant effect of perspective-taking on money spent ( $F(1, 186) = 3.43, p = .06$ ), such that after perspective-taking they spent more money ( $M_{\text{taking}} = 2.96$ ) than did those without perspective-taking ( $M_{\text{no-taking}} = 2.35$ ). Perspective-taking had no influence on the amount of money spent by dual-identity consumers ( $M_{\text{taking}} = 2.25$  vs.  $M_{\text{no-taking}} = 2.38; F(1, 186) = .17, p = .68$ ).

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Insert Figure 6 about here

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The results of this study of purchasing behavior provide further support for H2. That is, when persuasion attempts have low ulterior motives, perspective-taking can lead sole-identity consumers to more accurately respond, and they spend more money. This finding indicates that perspective-taking is one way to mitigate sole-identity consumers’ negative reactions to salespeople who use persuasion attempts with low ulterior motives.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current research shows that dual-identity consumers (individuals with sales agent experience) tend to have their agent identity automatically activated in shopping environments (pretest and Study 2). Accordingly, this makes them more likely to take the perspective of the sales agent than are sole-identity consumers (individuals without sales experience). As a result, dual-identity consumers respond differently to persuasion attempts with low versus high ulterior motives. This is evidenced by increased interaction time and future interaction intentions under low ulterior motives. Compared to dual-identity individuals, sole-identity consumers exhibit more defensive reactions, regardless of the level of ulterior motives. We further demonstrate that perspective-taking can reduce defensive reactions and plays an important role in the different responses of dual- versus sole-identity consumers to low versus high ulterior motives. When sole-identity consumers are asked to take the perspective of a sales agent, they exhibit similar responses to those of dual-identity consumers.

### *Theoretical Contributions*

This research makes a theoretical contribution by building on the PKM, which suggests that individuals' reactions to a persuasion attempt depend on their perceptions of the persuasive agent's intentions (Friestad and Wright 1994). However, the PKM does not discuss the role of identity and perspective-taking in interpreting a persuasive agent's intentions. We identify identity and its mechanism (perspective-taking) as additional variables that may influence how consumers respond to persuasion attempts, and these variables were not initially conceptualized as part of the PKM. This finding augments our understanding of how identity is particularly relevant in consumption contexts. We further show that perspective-taking plays an important role in the differing responses of dual- and sole-identity consumers. Thus, one key theoretical implication of the current work lies in our notion that perspective-taking is a critical component

of the process underlying the observed effects.

Our conceptualization proposes that the negative responses to persuasive attempts on the part of the sole-identity consumers are driven by a lack of perspective-taking and a subsequent tendency to engage in increased defensive processing. Because of this, sole-identity consumers exhibit defensive thoughts towards influencers in retail settings, regardless of low versus high ulterior motives. We show that manipulations of perspective-taking can lead otherwise defensive sole-identity consumers to better recognize that there is no objective reason to be suspicious of the sales agent. In making this contribution, we build on previous work in consumer suspicion and distrust of persuasive attempts (Main et al. 2007) to show that perspective-taking can mitigate and attenuate defensive reactions.

More importantly, our focus on perspective-taking as the underlying process also sheds light on an aspect of the PKM that has received little empirical research support. In particular, one underdeveloped aspect of the original PKM involves the notion that people can alternate between agent and target roles (Friestad and Wright 1994). The current work shows that perspective-taking can be an effective bridge to connect the agent and target roles, which helps clarify the mechanism determining the differing responses to persuasion attempts when roles are different. We also examined the possible alternative explanation that sales knowledge alone accounts for the switch between agent and target roles. Although there is no support in the current research for the notion that sales knowledge alone adequately accounts for these observed effects, future research might examine the role of sales knowledge in more detail. It might be the case, for example, in particular sales contexts (e.g., familiar vs. unfamiliar) that sales knowledge plays a more central role. In a familiar sales context, consumers have more sales knowledge than in an unfamiliar sales context. Accordingly, sales knowledge might be an

alternate mechanism that helps determine dual- and sole-identity consumers' responses to persuasion attempts.

### *Practical Contributions and Directions for Future Research*

In terms of practical implications, it is in the consumer's best interest to be able to accurately detect when a persuasive agent has ulterior motives or is instead acting for the benefit of the consumer. Importantly, we show that encouraging sole-identity consumers (who might normally be suspicious) to engage in perspective-taking can improve their ability to detect low versus high ulterior motives. Thus, one practical way to motivate consumers to respond accurately to persuasive appeals in retail contexts is to encourage perspective-taking.

The current research suggests that retail managers and employees would do well to encourage perspective-taking in ways that can reduce defensive thoughts and assumptions about the ulterior motives of sales agents in retail settings. Retailers could highlight the point-of-view of their employees using techniques such as employee spotlights (similar to Study 3). Highlighting the perspective of the retail agent via an "employee spotlight" could be done on webpages or in-store on flyers, posters, or even on the product itself. In one example, the cosmetics company Lush places labels on their products with the name and a cartoon caricature of the employee who created the product. In another example, bookstores such as Indigo put stickers on books that say "Heather's Pick." Strategies such as these likely make the consumer see the staff of the retailer as "real people," and the consumer becomes more likely to take the employee's perspective. To make perspective-taking more effective, the store might use dynamic (e.g., video of their employees) as opposed to static pictures (Roggeveen et al. 2015). Future research might test the effectiveness of different means of conveying the point-of-view of retail employees to customers.

Another managerial implication is based on segmentation. We found that the sales agent identity tends to be automatically activated for dual-identity consumers in a natural shopping environment, and the numbers of dual-identity consumers seem to indicate a large group. Dual-identity consumers tend to respond more accurately to persuasion attempts with low ulterior motives. Because of this, some retailers might consider targeting those with retail experience by developing selling tactics that use low ulterior motives (e.g., avoiding flattery when interacting with dual-identity consumers).

Future research could examine other potential strategies that increase consumer perspective-taking. A possible way to encourage increased perspective-taking is through customer engagement. One way to increase customer engagement is by leveraging social media (Grewal, Roggeveen, and Nordfalt 2017). Thus, increasing social interactions between the retail staff and customers could be one means of enhancing perspective-taking. This might be done by having staff participate in local events (such as fairs or festivals), and even having a customer appreciation night where customers can interact in a social setting with retail staff. While we did not look at this possibility, this is certainly something that future research may wish to examine.

In an effort to decrease defensiveness among consumers, future studies could examine other moderators, such as feelings of psychological closeness with the persuasive agent. While past research demonstrates that perspective-taking may lead to increased perceptions of self-other overlap (Galinsky, Ku, and Wang 2005), it may also be the case that using strategies that increase the individual's belief that his or her self-concept overlaps with the group may enhance perspective-taking. Thus another potential way to increase perspective-taking might be to encourage consumers to see themselves as members of the same group as agents. For example, Showcase Cinemas in the UK has insider pricing promotions that are available for members

only, and the company provides access to special prices and advance screenings to customers. This leads to the interesting possibility that membership or loyalty programs may be another way to activate thoughts of shared group membership. If one categorizes the self as a “member” of the same group as the agent delivering the persuasion attempt, this might increase perspective-taking on the part of sole-identity consumers in ways that lead to decreased defensiveness. Future research could examine this intriguing moderator.

Level of involvement with a particular purchase category is another potential factor that may influence responses of dual- and sole-identity consumers. When involvement is high, people are likely to engage in deliberate processing (Roggeveen et al. 2015), which may decrease the tendency for sole-identity consumers to respond similarly to low and high ulterior motives. However, it may also be the case that high-involvement purchases put sole-identity consumers “on guard,” making them overly defensive regardless of whether contextual cues point to low or high ulterior motives. Finally, the current research did not distinguish between dual-identity consumers who currently hold a sales position as compared to one held in the past. Dual-identity consumers who are currently working in a sales position may have a higher degree of perspective-taking than those who had prior experience as a salesperson. Accordingly, they may respond more positively to persuasion attempts with low ulterior motives. This could be a productive avenue to pursue in future research.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the current work demonstrates that sole-identity consumers are less likely to take the perspective of a persuasive agent and instead react to persuasion attempts in a manner consistent with defensive processing. They tend to react to persuasive attempts uniformly, as if persuasive agents in retail contexts always have unethical or manipulative intentions, even when

there is no evidence of ulterior motives. On the other hand, dual-identity consumers with an agent identity activated respond more accurately to persuasion attempts, reacting appropriately to cues that signal low versus high ulterior motives. We hope this research is a first step toward encouraging future studies that examine how the identity activated in the retail context can impact individuals' responses.

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FIGURE 1:  
THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL MODEL

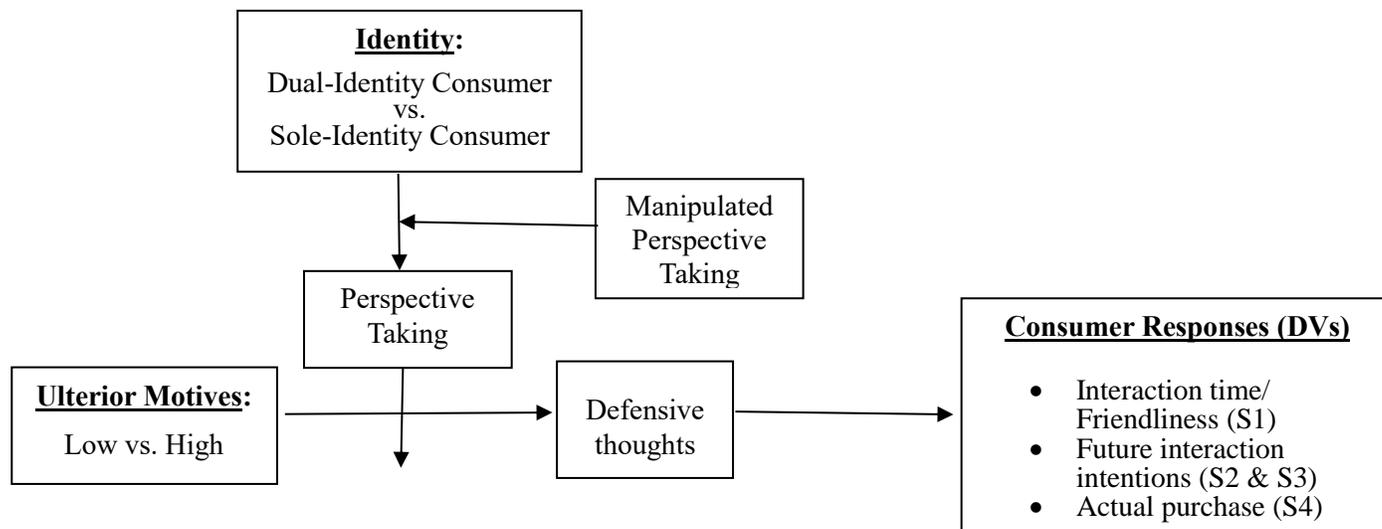


FIGURE 2

THE INFLUENCE OF ULTERIOR MOTIVES AND IDENTITY ON TIME SPENT WITH  
THE PERSUASIVE AGENT (minutes) (STUDY 1)

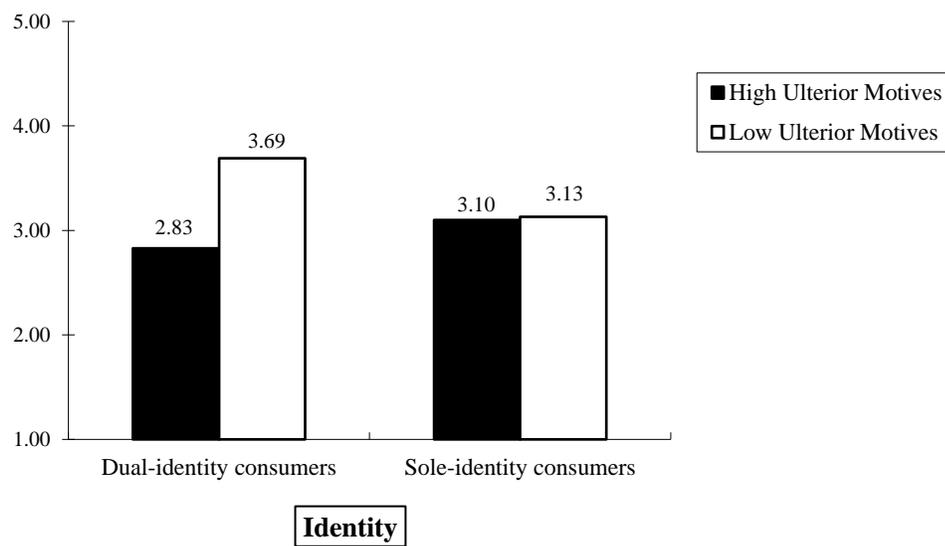


FIGURE 3  
THE INFLUENCE OF ULTERIOR MOTIVES AND IDENTITY ON PERCEPTIONS OF  
FRIENDLINESS (STUDY 1)

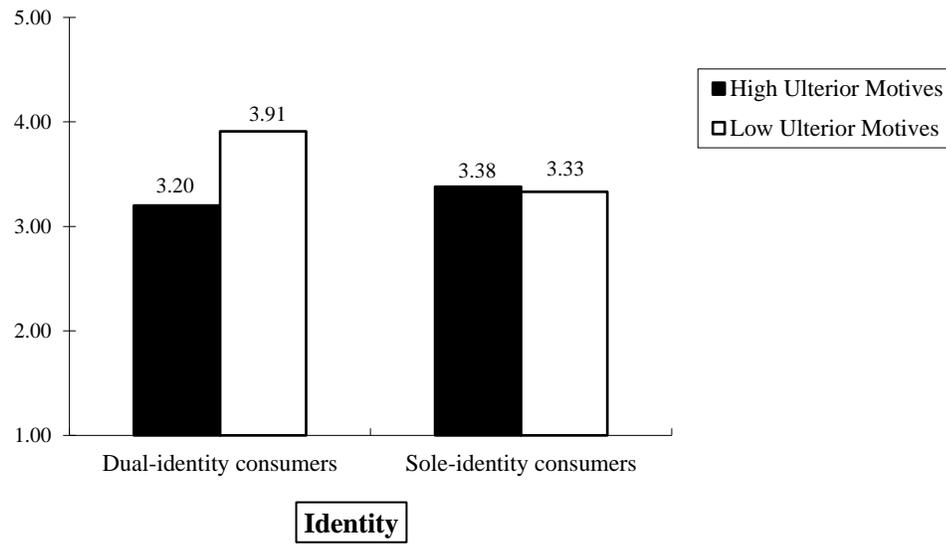


FIGURE 4  
THE INFLUENCE OF ULTERIOR MOTIVES AND IDENTITY ON FUTURE  
INTERACTION INTENTIONS (STUDY 2)

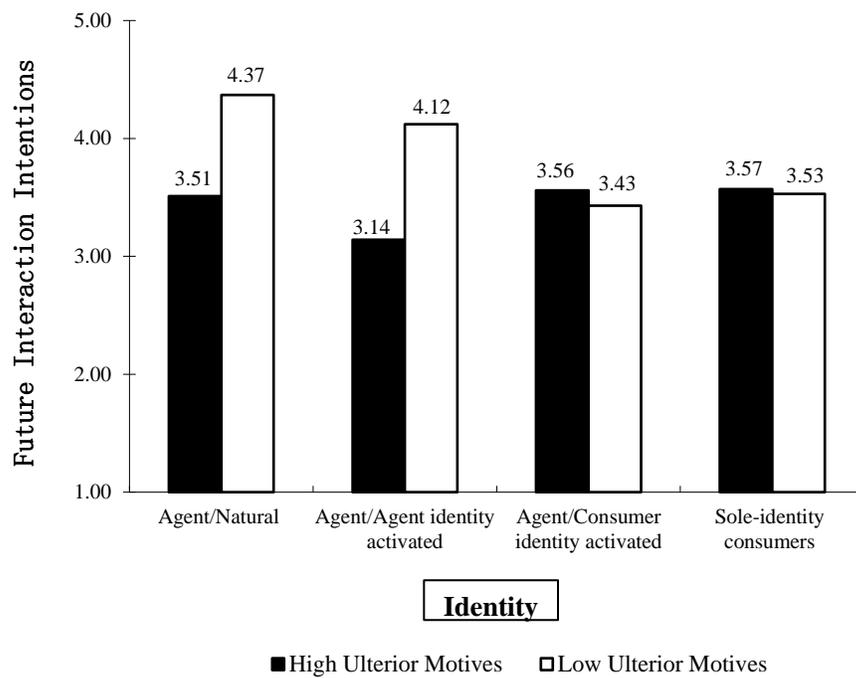


FIGURE 5  
THE INFLUENCE OF IDENTITY, ULTERIOR MOTIVES AND PERSPECTIVE-TAKING  
ON FUTURE INTERACTION INTENTIONS (STUDY 3)

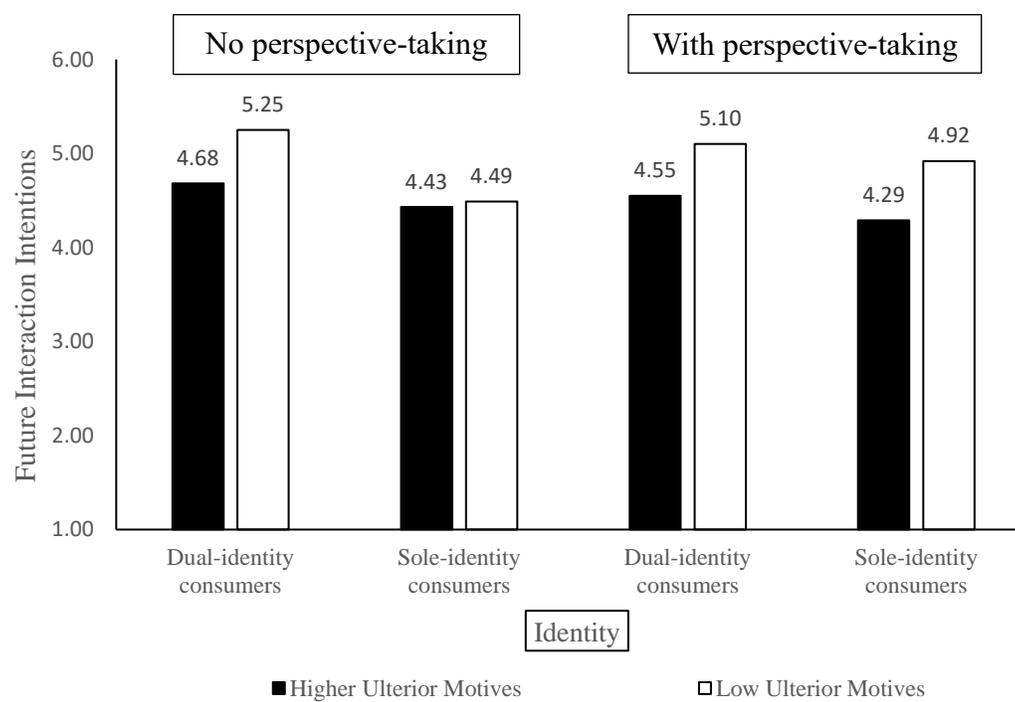
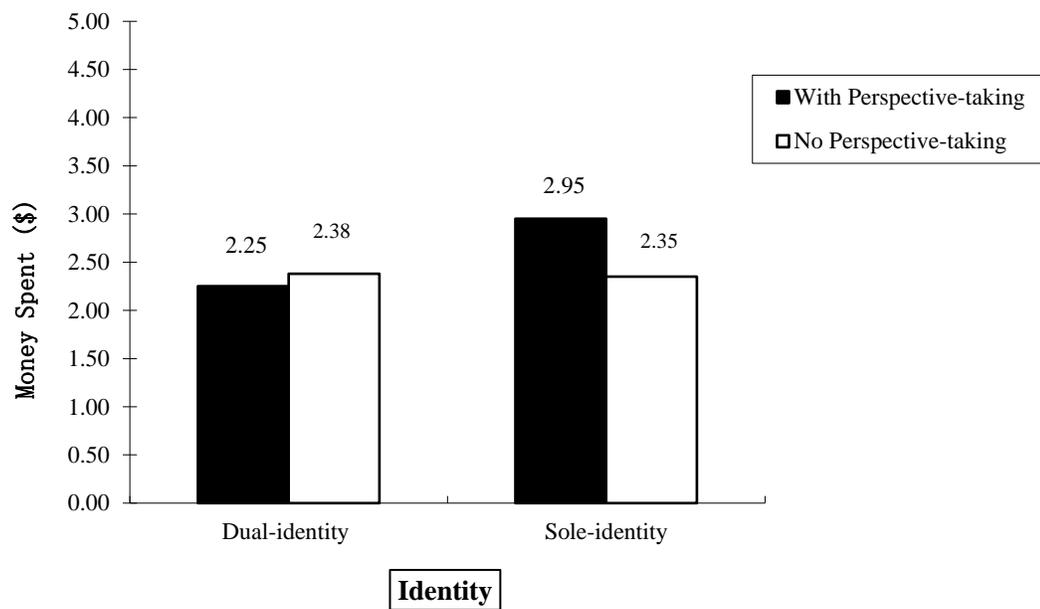


FIGURE 6

THE INFLUENCE OF PERSPECTIVE TAKING ON MONEY SPENT (\$) (STUDY 4)



## Appendix 1: Pilot Study

As a preliminary trial of the notion that the retail context activates the sales-agent identity among dual-identity consumers, we conducted an online pretest (N = 194 MTurk participants with no prior agent experience and N = 103 with agent experience). A key aspect of our conceptualization is that we believe dual-identity consumers are naturally able to take the perspective of the persuasive sales agent when this identity is activated in retail settings. This allows them to easily consider the persuasive agent's situation and respond accurately to cues. This predicted activation of identity is based in part on the importance of one's vocation in contributing to a sense of self-definition and self-worth (Schaufeli and Greenglass 2001), which can become salient as a result of contextual factors (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Hoegg and Terry 2000). Consistent with the priming literature, the experience of being a sales agent is likely to lead dual-identity consumers to draw upon this work identity in any retail setting. Over repeated associations, dual-identity consumers come to link the action-relevant constructs with the primed concepts in memory, resulting in spontaneous activation when the stimuli are again encountered.

We were particularly interested in whether the retail context brings to mind the identity of a retail "employee" for dual-identity consumers. Pretest participants were presented with four retail-oriented pictures (shopping bags, shopping mall, men's clothing store, and women's clothing store) *or* four non-retail-oriented pictures (park, church, sports arena, and library) to prime the retail versus non-retail contexts, respectively. Participants were then asked to consider the extent to which they were currently thinking about different aspects of their identity with regard to several possible identities (e.g., a brother/sister, citizen, and employee).

The results revealed a significant interaction between contextual priming (retail vs. non-retail) and the individual's role (consumer vs. agent) on the degree to which one's role as an employee came to mind ( $F(1, 297) = 5.28, p < .05$ ). For those with dual identities (i.e., those who have agent experience), the contextual priming of retail as opposed to non-retail settings led to greater activation of the "employee" identity ( $M_{\text{retail prime}} = 4.41$  vs.  $M_{\text{non-retail prime}} = 3.53; F(1, 297) = 4.15, p < .05$ ). For those with no agent experience (sole-identity consumers), contextual priming had no influence ( $M_{\text{retail prime}} = 3.42, M_{\text{non-retail prime}} = 3.78, F < 1, ns$ ). These results suggest that while the agent identity is not always activated for dual-identity consumers, it can become particularly accessible when retail contexts are made salient.

## Appendix 2

### The manipulation of low ulterior motives:

Please read the following scenario and answer a set of questions based on the scenario.

Imagine that you've gone to a store to buy a pair of sunglasses.

Picture yourself walking into the section of the store with sunglasses and seeing a wide array of choices. A salesclerk walks up to you and says, "Hi, may I help you find something?"

Imagine yourself responding—you shake your head and reply, "Maybe later. Right now I'm just looking."

Imagine that you have tried on two pairs of sunglasses and when you are trying on the third one, you decide it is the one to get. You make your way to the cash register and the salesclerk passes by to get to another part of the store and says, "That's a great pair of sunglasses. I think they look good on you. They really suit you." After this, the salesclerk walks away.

### The manipulation of high ulterior motives:

Please read the following scenario and answer a set of questions based on the scenario.

Imagine that you've gone to a store to buy a pair of sunglasses.

Picture yourself walking into the section of the store with sunglasses and seeing a wide array of choices. A salesclerk walks up to you and says, "Hi, may I help you find something?"

Imagine yourself responding—you shake your head and reply, "Maybe later. Right now I'm just looking."

Imagine that you have tried on two pairs of sunglasses and when you are trying on the third one, the salesclerk is passing by to get to another part of the store and says, "That's a great pair of sunglasses. I think they look good on you. They really suit you." After this, the salesclerk walks away.