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This article proposes that compared with a promotion regulatory focus, a prevention focus increases sensitivity to the advertiser's manipulative intent. Specifically, when message cues make manipulative intent moderately salient, prevention-focused people are more likely to activate persuasion knowledge and give less favorable brand evaluations than promotion-focused people. When message cues make manipulative intent highly salient or when manipulative intent is not salient, brand evaluations do not differ across regulatory foci. In addition, externally priming suspicion of manipulative intent makes promotion-focused people react similarly to prevention-focused people, suggesting that regulatory focus affects vigilance against persuasion.

Vigilant Against Manipulation: The Effect of Regulatory Focus on the Use of Persuasion Knowledge

In recent years, a growing body of literature has examined the content and structure of consumers' persuasion knowledge (i.e., consumers' intuitive theories about how marketers try to influence them; Friestad and Wright 1994). Although this literature suggests that persuasion knowledge is goal directed (e.g., Friestad and Wright 1994; Kirmani and Campbell 2004), little attention has been paid to the effect of motivational factors on the use of persuasion knowledge. This article addresses this gap by examining the effects of one motivational factor—namely, regulatory focus—on the activation of persuasion knowledge (and, thus, brand evaluations). According to regulatory focus theory (Higgins 1997), people can attain their goals in two ways, each involving the use of an alternative regulatory focus. Promotion-focused people perceive their goals as hopes and aspirations, and their predominant strategy is to approach matches to their goals. In contrast, prevention-focused people perceive the same goals as duties and obligations, and their predominant strategy is to avoid mismatches to their goals. Whereas a promotion focus is

characterized by eagerness to attain advancements, a prevention focus is characterized by vigilance to ensure safety.

Using an advertising context, we examine how regulatory focus interacts with message cues to affect the activation and use of persuasion knowledge, which in turn affects brand evaluations. We propose that compared with a promotion focus, a prevention focus increases sensitivity to the advertiser's manipulative intent. In the first study, we show that prevention-focused people are likely to activate persuasion knowledge in the presence of message cues that make the advertiser's manipulative intent highly or moderately salient. In contrast, promotion-focused people are likely to activate persuasion knowledge only when message cues make manipulative intent highly salient. Study 2 demonstrates that differences in sensitivity to manipulative intent underlie these effects, and Study 3 further delves into the underlying process.

We posit that the effects of regulatory focus on persuasion knowledge activation reflect differences in the direction of processing (i.e., sensitivity to manipulative intent) rather than the depth of processing (i.e., cognitive resources) (Pham and Avnet 2004). This article contributes to the knowledge of the theoretical antecedents of persuasion knowledge. Prior research has shown that persuasion knowledge is more likely to be activated when depth of processing is high (e.g., when people have high motivation, ability, and opportunity to process information; Campbell and Kirmani 2000). We suggest that, with depth of processing held constant, people's regulatory focus can influence the direction of processing, thus activating persuasion knowledge and affecting brand evaluations.

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In the next section, we describe research on persuasion knowledge and regulatory focus and develop hypotheses about the effects of regulatory focus on the use of persuasion knowledge. We report three studies to test hypotheses and process and conclude with implications for further research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Message Cues and Persuasion Knowledge

Persuasion knowledge helps consumers identify when someone is trying to persuade them and how to respond to these persuasion attempts in a way that achieves their own goals (Friestad and Wright 1994). Persuasion knowledge consists of various beliefs, such as determining which persuasion tactics marketers use; how these tactics affect psychological mediators, such as getting attention, generating interest, or inducing emotion; which tactics are effective or appropriate in different situations; and what the firms' goals and motives are. Activation of persuasion knowledge usually entails suspicion about the marketer's ulterior motives, skepticism toward advertising claims, and perceptions of firms or marketing agents as deceptive or manipulative. Suspicion of firms' ulterior motives or manipulative intent leads to resistance to persuasion, resulting in less favorable brand or agent attitudes (Campbell 1995; Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Jain and Posavac 2004).

We propose that when people process advertisements, the tendency to activate persuasion knowledge may depend on two factors: (1) the extent to which message cues make manipulative intent salient and (2) regulatory focus. Message cues that increase the salience of the advertiser's manipulative intent or ulterior motive are likely to activate persuasion knowledge (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). For example, advertisements that use certain types of attention-getting tactics, such as delayed sponsor identification, a borrowed interest appeal, or negative comparisons, increase perceptions of the firm's manipulative intent, thus resulting in less favorable brand evaluations (Campbell 1995; Jain and Posavac 2004). Moreover, message cues that might be potentially misleading or deceptive, such as disclosures (Johar and Simmons 2000) and incomplete comparisons (Barone et al. 1999), may activate persuasion knowledge, at least among consumers who recognize them as persuasion tactics.

We propose that message cues are likely to vary in terms of the salience of manipulative intent. Some message cues (e.g., a biased source) make manipulative intent highly salient, whereas other cues (e.g., an independent source) make manipulative intent less salient. In between these two extremes are cues that may make manipulative intent moderately salient, referred to as "ambiguous cues," because they may have multiple interpretations (Hoch 2002), one of which is an inference of manipulative intent. For example, an incomplete comparison (e.g., Brand X is better than the leading brand) may be interpreted as indicating Brand X's superiority or may raise suspicion about why the advertiser did not specify the leading brand. For ambiguous cues, situational or individual characteristics may determine whether manipulative intent becomes more salient than another interpretation. We suggest that people's regulatory focus affects how they react to ambiguous message cues. We suggest that prevention-focused people are more likely

than promotion-focused people to interpret ambiguous cues as reflecting manipulative intent.

Regulatory Focus and Persuasion Knowledge

According to regulatory focus theory, people can attain their goals in two ways, each involving the use of an alternative regulatory focus (Higgins 1987; Higgins et al. 1994). Promotion-focused people perceive their goals as hopes and ideals. Thus, they are sensitive to the presence or absence of such positive outcomes and are inclined to approach matches to their goals. In contrast, prevention-focused people perceive the same goals as duties and obligations. Thus, they are sensitive to the absence or presence of these negative outcomes and are inclined to avoid mismatches to their goals. Promotion- and prevention-focused people have been shown to exhibit different psychological states during the process of goal attainment (Crowe and Higgins 1997; Liberman et al. 1999). Whereas promotion-focused people are likely to pursue their goals with eagerness, prevention-focused people are likely to pursue their goals with vigilance.

This fundamental difference in the use of approach versus avoidance strategies may affect various consumer behaviors, such as information processing (Pham and Higgins 2005), hypothesis generation (Liberman et al. 2001), and memory (Higgins et al. 1994). For example, Pham and Higgins (2005) suggest that during information search, promotion-focused people's approach tendencies make them more likely to focus on positive signals about the available options during search. In contrast, prevention-focused people's avoidance tendencies make them more likely to focus on negative signals. Because the use of persuasion knowledge entails negative attributions about the advertiser's manipulative intent, this suggests that promotion- and prevention-focused people activate persuasion knowledge differently when viewing an advertisement.

Specifically, we propose that because promotion-focused people attempt to approach matches to the desired end state, they are likely to focus on positive information and use approach strategies when viewing an advertisement. Given the goal of making a good decision about the product, they may think in terms of how the ad information can help them make a purchase decision. Promotion-focused people evoke negative persuasion knowledge only when presented with cues that make manipulative intent highly salient. Thus, their brand evaluations are likely to be more favorable when message cues make manipulative intent less or moderately salient than when message cues make manipulative intent highly salient.

In contrast, because prevention-focused people attempt to avoid mismatches to the desired end state, they are more likely to focus on negative information and use avoidance strategies when viewing an advertisement. In attempting to make a good decision, they may think in terms of how to avoid being unduly persuaded. Thus, they may be vigilant against manipulation, leading to activation of negative persuasion knowledge and greater skepticism about ad claims, even in the presence of ambiguous cues. This suggests that their brand evaluations are likely to be more favorable when message cues make manipulative intent less salient than when message cues make manipulative intent moderately or highly salient. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H₁: Compared with a promotion focus, a prevention focus leads to less favorable brand evaluations in the presence of ambiguous cues. Brand evaluations are equally unfavorable across levels of regulatory focus in the presence of cues that make manipulative intent highly salient and equally favorable in the presence of cues that make manipulative intent less salient.

H₂: Persuasion knowledge mediates the effects of regulatory focus and salience of manipulative intent on brand evaluations.

Finally, as we mentioned previously, our predictions are based on differences in direction, rather than depth, of processing across regulatory foci. We do not claim that vigilance increases the amount of processing devoted to the advertisement; rather, prevention-focused people are more sensitive to manipulative intent. Moreover, although the notion that regulatory focus entails differences in direction rather than depth of processing is similar to that of Pham and Avnet (2004), our process is different from that of Pham and Avnet, who observed that promotion-focused people are more likely to base judgments on their subjective affective reactions to the advertisement, whereas prevention-focused people are more likely to base judgments on the substance of the message. In contrast, we claim that both prevention- and promotion-focused people examine the message content, but their reactions to the content differ.

STUDY 1

The objective of Study 1 was to test H₁ and H₂. The study employed a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion versus prevention) \times 3 (salience of manipulative intent: low, moderate, or high) between-subjects design. Respondents were 129 undergraduate students who received course credit for participation and who were randomly assigned to treatments.

Manipulations

We manipulated regulatory focus by priming ideals (promotion) or oughts (prevention). In the promotion-focus condition, respondents were asked to think about their past hopes, aspirations, and dreams and to list two of them. In addition, they were asked to think about their current hopes, aspirations, and dreams and to list two. In the prevention-focus condition, respondents thought about their past duties, obligations, and responsibilities and listed two; they also thought about their current duties, obligations, and responsibilities and listed two. This manipulation has been shown to be effective in other studies (e.g., Pham and Avnet 2004).

Respondents saw a one-page print advertisement for the target brand of digital cameras, called Calan. The advertisement contained a headline, a picture of the camera, and three sets of claims in the copy (see Appendix A). We manipulated the salience of manipulative intent through the second claim, which varied the source of a study and the type of comparison. Specifically, the target claim reported results from a study in which "consumers rated Calan as producing better quality pictures than the leading brand." We expected that this incomplete comparison would be more ambiguous than a comparison that specified the lead-

ing brands, such as Canon and Kodak. A between-subjects pretest on a different group of 57 respondents from the same population showed that the incomplete comparison claim was perceived as more ambiguous than the specific comparison claim ($M_{\text{specific comparison}} = 2.59$, $M_{\text{ambiguous comparison}} = 3.50$; $F(1, 55) = 4.13$, $p < .05$; 1 = "not at all ambiguous," and 7 = "extremely ambiguous"). Thus, the incomplete comparison made manipulative intent moderately salient because some people might be suspicious that the firm was intentionally omitting the name of a mediocre referent brand.

In addition, the study was attributed to either an independent source (i.e., *Consumer Reports*) or a biased source (i.e., the Calan company). When the source was biased, the advertiser's manipulative intent was highly salient. The pretest also established that perceived manipulative intent was higher when the source of a study was biased than when it was independent. Specifically, two groups of respondents were presented with a claim regarding a study by either an independent source or a biased source and were asked to rate the extent to which it reflected an attempt to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means on a seven-point scale (higher numbers indicated greater manipulateness). The claim was perceived as more manipulative when the source was biased than when it was independent ($M_{\text{biased}} = 5.33$, $M_{\text{independent}} = 4.30$; $F(1, 55) = 4.51$, $p < .04$).

Taking the study source and the type of comparison together, we find that salience of manipulative intent was high when the study was done by a biased source (Calan) and the comparison was ambiguous (leading brand). Salience of manipulative intent was moderate when the study was done by an independent source (*Consumer Reports*) and the comparison was ambiguous (leading brand). Finally, salience of manipulative intent was low when the study was done by an independent source (*Consumer Reports*) and the comparison was specific (leading brands, such as Canon and Kodak).

Measures

Brand attitude and perceived quality. We measured attitude toward the brand (A_b) as an average of three seven-point items: "unfavorable/favorable," "dislike/like," and "unappealing/appealing" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$). In addition, perceived quality was measured relative to other digital cameras as an average of five seven-point items: "lower/higher quality," "performance," "reliability," "sharp pictures," and "stylishness" ($\alpha = .90$).

Persuasion knowledge. We measured activation of persuasion knowledge in two ways. The first was respondents' assessment of the advertisement's deceptiveness, which was a measure of skepticism about the advertisement. This measure was an average of three seven-point items that rated the advertisement: "unbelievable/believable," "not truthful/truthful," and "deceptive/nondeceptive" ($\alpha = .83$). These items are reverse coded, so higher numbers indicate greater deceptiveness.

The second measure of persuasion knowledge was based on thought protocols. Respondents were asked to record all the thoughts, feelings, or impressions they had about the product and/or advertisement. We coded these thoughts for

persuasion knowledge, including suspicion about the firm's motives or manipulative intent (e.g., "I don't believe a study done by the company") and skepticism about ad claims (e.g., "With which leading brands are they comparing?"). Intercoder reliability was .94.

Manipulation checks and confounds. Recall that our basic premise is that compared with a promotion focus, a prevention focus increases vigilance against persuasion. As a check to determine whether regulatory focus affects suspicion about being persuaded, we asked respondents to indicate their suspicion. The question stated, "Before I saw the ad, I suspected the advertisement would contain undue persuasion" (1 = "strongly disagree," and 7 = "strongly agree"). This measure followed all the other measures.

Finally, to ensure that regulatory focus affects direction rather than depth of processing, we measured depth of processing in two ways. First, because involvement can lead to greater depth of processing (e.g., Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao 1986), we measured self-reported involvement as a composite of three items on a seven-point scale in response to the question, "As you examined the ad, how did you feel?" ("involved," "interested," "engaged"; $\alpha = .95$). Second, we assessed the total number of relevant thoughts in the protocols. This reflects the extent of message elaboration and, thus, depth of processing.

Results

Manipulation check. To test whether a prevention focus induced a higher suspicion level than a promotion focus before participants saw the advertisement, we ran a 2×3 analysis of variance (ANOVA) on participants' reported suspicion of the advertisement's containing undue persuasion. Only a main effect of regulatory focus emerged as significant ($F(1, 123) = 4.93, p < .03$); prevention-focused respondents reported higher suspicion levels than promotion-focused respondents before they saw the adver-

tisement ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.22, M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.80$). This provides support for the basic premise of differential suspicion.

Depth of processing. A 2×3 ANOVA revealed no significant main or interaction effects on either of the two measures of depth of processing (all $ps > .14$). The level of self-reported involvement and total number of thoughts were the same across conditions (for cell means, see Table 1). Thus, as we expected, regulatory focus did not affect depth of processing.

Brand attitude and perceived quality. H_1 suggests an interaction between regulatory focus and salience of manipulative intent on brand evaluations. A 2×3 ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect on both brand attitude ($F(2, 123) = 3.10, p < .05$) and perceived quality ($F(2, 123) = 3.14, p < .05$). In addition, there was a main effect of salience of manipulative intent on both measures; specifically, there were more favorable evaluations as salience decreased (brand attitude: $M_{\text{low}} = 4.32, M_{\text{moderate}} = 3.82, M_{\text{high}} = 3.05; F(2, 123) = 8.41, p < .001$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{low}} = 4.42, M_{\text{moderate}} = 4.12, M_{\text{high}} = 3.41; F(2, 123) = 9.64, p < .001$).

The interaction effect (see Figure 1) was consistent with H_1 . Prevention-focused respondents formed less favorable brand evaluations than promotion-focused respondents when salience of manipulative intent was moderate (brand attitude: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.41, M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.23; F(1, 123) = 7.04, p < .01$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.51, M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.72; F(1, 123) = 5.73, p < .02$). However, their evaluations were equivalent when salience was low (brand attitude: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.33, M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.30; F < 1$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.30, M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.53; F < 1$) and when salience was high (brand attitude: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 2.89, M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.21; F < 1$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.30, M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.52; F < 1$).

Contrasts within regulatory focus revealed that promotion-focused respondents gave less favorable evalua-

Table 1
STUDY 1: CELL MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

	Low Salience of Manipulative Intent		Moderate Salience of Manipulative Intent		High Salience of Manipulative Intent	
	Promotion Focus	Prevention Focus	Promotion Focus	Prevention Focus	Promotion Focus	Prevention Focus
Brand attitude ^a	4.33 (1.64)	4.30 (1.83)	4.41 (1.79)	3.23 (1.12)	2.89 (1.04)	3.21 (.81)
Perceived quality ^a	4.30 (1.43)	4.53 (1.06)	4.51 (1.22)	3.72 (.77)	3.30 (.96)	3.52 (.90)
Perceived ad deceptiveness ^b	3.25 (1.48)	2.97 (1.01)	3.16 (.98)	4.03 (1.38)	3.92 (.91)	3.98 (.89)
Total number of thoughts	4.33 (2.11)	4.22 (2.49)	3.83 (2.12)	4.70 (2.05)	5.00 (3.16)	3.43 (2.80)
Number of persuasion knowledge thoughts	.33 (.58)	.17 (.39)	.17 (.39)	1.00 (1.62)	.90 (1.45)	.81 (1.12)
Involvement ^a	2.75 (.98)	3.13 (1.46)	3.24 (1.19)	3.67 (1.83)	2.71 (1.35)	3.36 (1.66)
Cell sizes	21	23	23	20	21	21

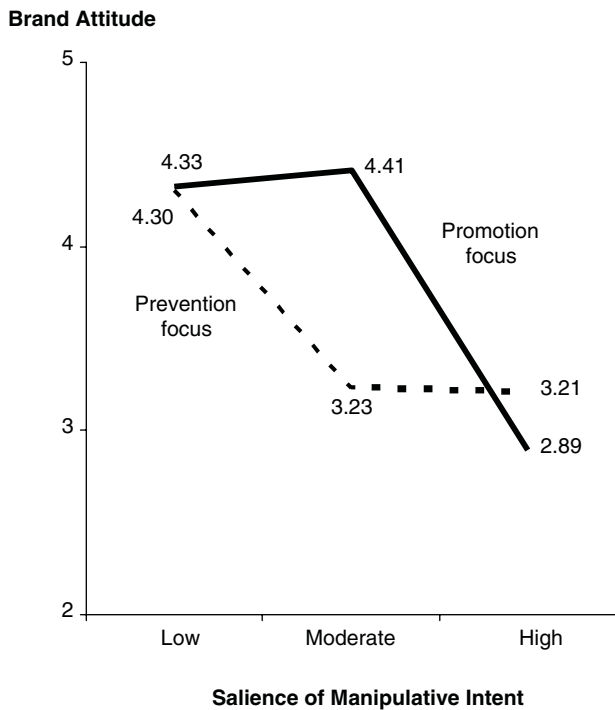
^aMeasured on a seven-point scale; higher numbers indicate more positive scores.

^bMeasured on a seven-point scale; higher numbers indicate greater deceptiveness.

Notes: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Figure 1

STUDY 1: REGULATORY FOCUS (PROMOTION VERSUS PREVENTION) INTERACTS WITH SALIENCE OF MANIPULATIVE INTENT (LOW VERSUS MODERATE VERSUS HIGH) TO AFFECT BRAND ATTITUDE



tions when salience of manipulative intent was high than when it was moderate (brand attitude: $F(1, 123) = 12.10, p < .001$; perceived quality: $F(1, 123) = 13.66, p < .001$) or low (brand attitude: $F(1, 123) = 10.49, p < .01$; perceived quality: $F(1, 123) = 8.95, p < .01$). The difference between moderate and low salience was not significant ($F_s < 1$). In contrast, prevention-focused respondents formed more favorable brand evaluations when salience of manipulative intent was low than when it was high (brand attitude: $F(1, 123) = 6.34, p < .05$; perceived quality: $F(1, 123) = 9.48, p < .01$) or moderate (brand attitude: $F(1, 123) = 5.88, p < .05$; perceived quality: $F(1, 123) = 5.99, p < .05$). The difference between moderate and high salience conditions was not significant ($F_s < 1$). Thus, H_1 is supported.

Persuasion knowledge. H_2 predicted that persuasion knowledge would mediate these effects. Separate ANOVAs on perceived ad deceptiveness and persuasion knowledge thoughts (PK thoughts) revealed a significant interaction effect (ad deceptiveness: $F(2, 123) = 3.00, p < .05$; PK thoughts: $F(2, 123) = 3.08, p < .05$). As with brand evaluations, prevention-focused respondents were more likely to activate persuasion knowledge than promotion-focused respondents when salience of manipulative intent was moderate (ad deceptiveness: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.16, M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.03; F(1, 123) = 6.43, p < .02$; PK thoughts: $M_{\text{promotion}} = .17, M_{\text{prevention}} = 1.00; F(1, 123) = 6.89, p < .01$). They were equally likely to activate persuasion knowledge when salience was high (ad deceptiveness: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.92,$

$M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.98; F < 1$; PK thoughts: $M_{\text{promotion}} = .90, M_{\text{prevention}} = .81; F < 1$) and were equally unlikely to activate persuasion knowledge when salience was low (ad deceptiveness: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.25, M_{\text{prevention}} = 2.97; F < 1$; PK thoughts: $M_{\text{promotion}} = .33, M_{\text{prevention}} = .17; F < 1$).

Contrasts within regulatory focus revealed that for promotion-focused respondents, persuasion knowledge was more likely to be used when salience of manipulative intent was high than when it was moderate (ad deceptiveness: $F(1, 123) = 5.01, p < .05$; PK thoughts: $F(1, 123) = 5.53, p < .02$) or low (ad deceptiveness: $F(1, 123) = 3.67, p < .06$; PK thoughts: $F(1, 123) = 3.24, p < .07$). The difference between moderate- and low-salience conditions was not significant ($F_s < 1$). For prevention-focused respondents, persuasion knowledge was more likely to be used when salience of manipulative intent was high than when it was low (ad deceptiveness: $F(1, 123) = 8.87, p < .01$; PK thoughts: $F(1, 123) = 4.19, p < .05$) or when salience of manipulative intent was moderate than when it was low (ad deceptiveness: $F(1, 123) = 9.41, p < .01$; PK thoughts: $F(1, 123) = 6.89, p < .01$). The difference between the moderate- and high-salience conditions was not significant ($F_s < 1$). The protocols revealed that prevention-focused respondents were skeptical about the comparison brand in the moderate-manipulative-intent condition; for example, they questioned what the leading brands were.

To assess whether persuasion knowledge mediated the treatment effects on brand attitude and perceived quality, we conducted mediation analyses (Baron and Kenny 1986). First, we examined whether perceived ad deceptiveness mediated the treatment effects on brand evaluations. The regulatory focus \times salience of manipulative intent interaction was significant on brand evaluations (brand attitude: $b = .23, p < .02$; perceived quality: $b = .18, p < .02$) and perceived ad deceptiveness ($b = .17, p < .03$). However, the treatment effects on brand evaluations were fully mediated by perceived ad deceptiveness (brand attitude: $b_{\text{interaction}} = .12, p = .17$; $b_{\text{ad deceptiveness}} = .66, p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 2.16, p < .03$; perceived quality: $b_{\text{interaction}} = .09, p = .16$; $b_{\text{ad deceptiveness}} = .53, p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 2.18, p < .03$). Similarly, PK thoughts also mediated the treatment effects on brand evaluations. The interaction effect was significant on PK thoughts ($b = -.16, p < .02$). However, the treatment effects on brand evaluations were fully mediated by PK thoughts (brand attitude: $b_{\text{interaction}} = .16, p = .08$; $b_{\text{PK thoughts}} = -.34, p < .01$; Sobel: $Z = 1.92, p < .05$; perceived quality: $b_{\text{interaction}} = .13, p = .08$; $b_{\text{PK thoughts}} = -.31, p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 2.02, p < .05$). Thus, as H_2 predicted, persuasion knowledge mediated the treatment effects on brand evaluations.

Discussion

The results from Study 1 provide support for the hypotheses that regulatory focus interacts with message cues to affect brand evaluations and that activation of persuasion underlies these effects. In support of the basic premise that a prevention focus makes people more vigilant against persuasion, prevention-focused respondents indicated greater suspicion of undue persuasion than promotion-focused respondents before ad exposure. On seeing the advertisement, prevention-focused respondents were more suspicious about brand claims, perceived the adver-

tisement as more deceptive, and evaluated the brand less favorably when presented with message cues that made manipulative intent highly or moderately salient. In contrast, promotion-focused respondents were suspicious and reacted unfavorably only when message cues made manipulative intent highly salient.

The differences across regulatory foci could not be attributed to depth of processing, given the same level of cognitive responses (i.e., the total number of relevant thoughts) and self-reported involvement level. These results are consistent with those of Pham and Avnet (2004), who find that the same manipulation of regulatory focus does not affect involvement, mood, or need for cognition. However, our process mechanism differs from theirs. Regression analysis revealed that, in our study, regulatory focus did not change respondents' reliance on substantive assessments versus subjective feelings in forming their attitudes. The regression analysis was similar to that which Pham and Avnet report (p. 508), and it showed no significant effects of regulatory focus on whether substantive assessments or subjective feelings affected brand attitude.

Study 1 provides some evidence that differences in sensitivity to manipulative intent underlie the responses of promotion- and prevention-focused people to ambiguous message cues. In Study 2, we expand on this finding by examining two process-related issues. First, we examine whether sensitivity to manipulative intent means that regulatory focus affects perceptions of the diagnosticity of manipulative intent, desirability of manipulative intent, or both. Our premise is that promotion- and prevention-focused people differ in terms of their perceptions of how diagnostic a cue is of manipulative intent and that these perceptions affect brand evaluations. However, it could be that the two foci also differ in terms of whether people believe that manipulative intent is desirable. In other words, prevention-focused people may find manipulative intent to be less appealing than do promotion-focused people. We directly measure desirability and diagnosticity to explore this issue.

Second, to confirm further that sensitivity to manipulative intent underlies the results, we increase the sensitivity of promotion-focused people to manipulative intent by externally priming suspicion. Externally priming suspicion should make promotion-focused people more vigilant about manipulative intent, leading them to respond similarly to prevention-focused people. Prior research has shown that external priming of suspicion can affect message processing. For example, Darke and Ritchie (2007) find that priming advertising deception may activate negative stereotypes about marketing, making people distrustful of advertising claims from the same or different source. Similarly, Campbell and Kirmani (2000) show that externally priming suspicion of ulterior motives may lead to negative evaluations of salespeople.

Because the differential effects of regulatory focus occurred only in the ambiguous cue condition (i.e., when manipulative intent was moderately salient), we examine this condition more carefully. We propose that externally priming suspicion of manipulative intent will activate promotion-focused respondents' persuasion knowledge. Therefore, compared with a no-suspicion priming condition, promotion-focused respondents primed with suspicion

may be more vigilant about manipulative intent when they see an advertisement with an ambiguous cue. This would result in less favorable brand evaluations for promotion-focused respondents when suspicion is primed than when it is not primed. In contrast, priming suspicion should not affect the responses of prevention-focused respondents, because their persuasion knowledge is already activated when they encounter an advertisement. This leads to the third hypothesis, which pertains to the situation in which ad cues are ambiguous about manipulative intent.

H₃: When suspicion is not primed, a prevention focus leads to more negative brand evaluations than a promotion focus. When suspicion is primed, however, brand evaluations are equally negative under a promotion and prevention focus.

STUDY 2

The objective of Study 2 was to examine further the underlying process mechanism for the effects we observed in Study 1. The study employed a 2 (regulatory focus: promotion versus prevention) × 2 (suspicion: externally primed versus not) between-subjects design. Respondents were 82 undergraduate students who received course credit for participation and who were randomly assigned to treatments.

Procedure and Manipulations

The procedure was similar to that in Study 1, except that the suspicion prime occurred before the regulatory focus manipulation. The suspicion priming manipulation was in the form of an unrelated task in a separate booklet before the main study. Respondents were told that they would be evaluating a short newspaper article for its relevance to college students. Two articles were created (see Appendix B). In the suspicion-primed condition, the article was intended to make consumers vigilant about corporate fraud. Specifically, the article described a company whose chief executive officer (CEO) fabricated financial figures to show a profit. Subsequently, auditors reviewed the company's financial statements and exposed the deception. Note that this article had nothing to do with advertising, reducing the likelihood that respondents would discern the relationship between the two studies and ensuring that the manipulation induced generalized suspicion rather than suspicion of advertising claims. A similar manipulation has been used in prior work (Darke and Argo 2005). In the suspicion-unprimed condition, the article described a new concept car at the design stage by Volkswagen.

To assess the equivalence of the two primes on dimensions unrelated to suspicion, respondents in this study evaluated the article on measures such as believable, interesting, informative, and meaningful (seven-point scales). These measures were combined to form an ad perception index ($\alpha = .72$). The ANOVA on this index revealed no significant differences across the two primes ($p > .16$). In addition, a separate pretest with 37 respondents from the same population assessed equivalence on other dimensions, such as mood and involvement. In a between-subjects design, respondents read either the suspicion prime ($n = 18$) or the no-suspicion prime ($n = 19$). They then filled out some measures, including the PANAS (positive and negative affect schedule) scale (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988), involvement, and suspicion. We analyzed responses to the

PANAS scale separately for positive and negative mood; we created a positive ($\alpha = .88$) and negative ($\alpha = .92$) mood scale (five-point scales) by averaging all positive items and all negative items, respectively. The ANOVA revealed that the primes did not differentially affect negative ($M_{\text{suspicion}} = 1.51$, $M_{\text{no suspicion}} = 1.26$; $F(1, 35) = 1.97$, $p > .17$) or positive ($M_{\text{suspicion}} = 2.27$, $M_{\text{no suspicion}} = 2.61$; $F(1, 35) = 1.67$, $p > .20$) mood. Similarly, we measured task involvement by the average of three items (involved, engaged, and interested) on seven-point scales ($\alpha = .78$). There were no differences across primes on the involvement measure ($M_{\text{suspicion}} = 4.43$, $M_{\text{no suspicion}} = 4.56$; $F < 1$). Finally, respondents assessed the extent to which the newspaper article made them feel suspicious (average of four items on seven-point scales: concerned, tricked, fooled, suspicious; $\alpha = .86$). The ANOVA revealed a significant effect of prime on this measure ($M_{\text{suspicion}} = 4.39$, $M_{\text{no suspicion}} = 2.32$; $F(1, 35) = 18.98$, $p < .001$). Thus, the primes were equivalent in terms of mood, involvement, and believability, but they differed in terms of generating suspicion.

After the suspicion-priming manipulation, respondents received the regulatory focus manipulation. We manipulated regulatory focus through priming hopes and ideals versus duties and obligations, as in Study 1. In addition, to ensure a strong regulatory focus manipulation, we added a word-search task. In the promotion condition, respondents searched for promotion-related words, such as “accomplish,” “achieve,” and “nurturance.” In the prevention condition, they searched for prevention-related words, such as “avoidance,” “caution,” and “security.”

Finally, all respondents saw the advertisement from the moderately-salient-manipulative-intent condition of Study 1, which contained the ambiguous message claim. They then responded to a series of measures, which were the same measures we used in Study 1, with the following exceptions: First, to assess diagnosticity of manipulative intent, respondents were shown the target claim again and were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed that the ad claim tried to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means (1 = “not at all,” and 7 = “extremely”). To assess desirability of manipulative intent, respondents indicated agreement with the statement, “It really offends me when a company attempts to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means” (1 = “strongly disagree,” and 7 = “strongly agree”). We solicited these measures after the other measures.

Second, to ensure that the suspicion-priming manipulation did not interfere with the regulatory focus manipulation, we added a manipulation check for regulatory focus, which was administered at the end. Respondents were asked to assess two headlines in terms of their suitability for the target advertisement. The first headline was framed with a promotion focus: “Capture Those Important Moments Now! Calan Camera, For Those Special Memories.” The second headline was framed with a prevention focus: “Don’t Let Those Important Moments Slip By! Calan Camera, For Those Special Memories.” Each headline was rated on three items measured on seven-point scales (“bad/good,” “inappropriate/appropriate,” and “unappealing/appealing”; $\alpha = .83$ and $.90$, respectively). If the regulatory focus manipulation was successful, promotion-focused (prevention-focused) participants

should give higher ratings of the promotion-oriented headline (prevention-oriented headline), in line with regulatory fit principles (Cesario, Grant, and Higgins 2004; Zhu 2003).

Results

Depth of processing. A 2×2 ANOVA revealed no significant main or interaction effects on the level of self-reported involvement and total number of thoughts (all $ps > .21$; for cell means, see Table 2). Thus, as in Study 1, regulatory focus did not affect depth of processing.

Regulatory focus manipulation check. A 2×2 ANOVA on the promotion-oriented headline revealed a significant main effect of regulatory focus ($F(1, 78) = 3.97$, $p < .05$) and no other significant treatment effects. As we expected, promotion-focused respondents reacted more favorably to the headline than prevention-focused respondents ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 5.03$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.48$). Similarly, there was a significant main effect of regulatory focus ($F(1, 78) = 8.06$, $p < .05$) and no other significant effects on reactions to the prevention-oriented headline, with more favorable reactions under a prevention than promotion focus ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.88$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.71$). Thus, the regulatory focus manipulation was successful.

Brand attitude and perceived quality. H_3 predicted an interaction effect between regulatory focus and suspicion priming on brand evaluations. A 2×2 ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect on both brand attitude ($F(1, 78) = 14.03$, $p < .001$) and perceived quality ($F(1, 78) = 11.02$, $p < .001$). In addition, there was a significant main effect of regulatory focus on the two measures (brand attitude: $F(1, 78) = 12.51$, $p < .001$; perceived quality: $F(1, 78) = 7.45$, $p < .01$) and a significant main effect of suspicion priming on perceived quality ($F(1, 78) = 13.04$, $p < .001$). Because the main effects were qualified by the significant interaction effect, we do not dwell on them.

As H_3 predicted, when suspicion was not primed, brand evaluations were significantly less favorable under a prevention than promotion focus (brand attitude: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.55$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 2.03$; $F(1, 78) = 26.52$, $p < .001$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.93$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 2.74$; $F = 18.29$, $p < .001$). This replicated the results in the ambiguous-cue condition of Study 1. When suspicion was externally primed, however, brand evaluations were equivalent under the two foci (brand attitude: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 2.42$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 2.46$; $F < 1$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 2.57$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 2.69$; $F < 1$). Thus, H_3 is supported.

Viewed differently, under a promotion focus, brand evaluations were less favorable when suspicion was primed than when it was not primed (brand attitude: $M_{\text{prime}} = 2.42$, $M_{\text{no prime}} = 3.55$; $F(1, 78) = 14.43$, $p < .001$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{prime}} = 2.57$, $M_{\text{no prime}} = 3.93$; $F(1, 78) = 23.44$, $p < .001$). Under a prevention focus, brand evaluations were not significantly different across primes (brand attitude: $M_{\text{prime}} = 2.46$, $M_{\text{no prime}} = 2.03$; $F(1, 78) = 2.17$, $p > .15$; perceived quality: $M_{\text{prime}} = 2.69$, $M_{\text{no prime}} = 2.74$; $F < 1$).

Persuasion knowledge. H_2 predicted that persuasion knowledge would mediate these effects. Separate ANOVAs on perceived ad deceptiveness and PK thoughts revealed a significant interaction effect (ad deceptiveness: $F(1, 78) = 9.20$, $p < .01$; PK thoughts: $F(1, 78) = 4.00$, $p < .05$). Mirroring the brand evaluation results, when suspicion was not primed, persuasion knowledge was more likely to be used

Table 2
STUDY 2: CELL MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

	<i>Suspicion Not Primed</i>		<i>Suspicion Primed</i>	
	<i>Promotion Focus</i>	<i>Prevention Focus</i>	<i>Promotion Focus</i>	<i>Prevention Focus</i>
Brand attitude ^a	3.55 (1.18)	2.03 (.81)	2.42 (.82)	2.46 (.92)
Perceived quality ^a	3.93 (1.07)	2.74 (.84)	2.57 (.78)	2.69 (.85)
Perceived ad deceptiveness ^b	3.43 (.97)	4.73 (1.29)	4.68 (1.30)	4.35 (1.28)
Number of persuasion knowledge thoughts	.30 (.47)	1.19 (1.08)	.90 (1.02)	.95 (1.07)
Diagnosticity of manipulative intent ^a	3.30 (1.56)	4.57 (1.17)	4.50 (1.28)	4.29 (1.62)
Desirability of manipulative intent ^c	5.20 (1.67)	4.71 (2.08)	5.00 (1.72)	4.76 (2.00)
Total number of thoughts	5.55 (2.09)	5.81 (1.60)	5.55 (2.11)	6.05 (2.11)
Involvement ^a	3.35 (1.61)	3.02 (.97)	2.90 (1.12)	3.25 (1.17)
Cell sizes	20	21	20	21

^aMeasured on a seven-point scale; higher numbers indicate more positive scores.

^bMeasured on a seven-point scale; higher numbers indicate greater deceptiveness.

^cMeasured on a seven-point scale; higher numbers indicate less desirability.

Notes: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

under a prevention than promotion focus (ad deceptiveness: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.43$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.73$; $F(1, 78) = 11.64$, $p < .001$; PK thoughts: $M_{\text{promotion}} = .30$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 1.19$; $F(1, 78) = 9.03$, $p < .01$). When suspicion was primed, however, persuasion knowledge was equivalent under the two foci (ad deceptiveness: $M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.68$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.35$; $F < 1$; PK thoughts: $M_{\text{promotion}} = .90$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = .95$; $F < 1$).

Further tests revealed that persuasion knowledge mediated the treatment effects on brand attitude and perceived quality. We first examine perceived ad deceptiveness as a mediator. The regulatory focus \times suspicion prime interaction was significant on brand evaluations (brand attitude: $b = 1.56$, $p < .001$; perceived quality: $b = 1.30$, $p < .001$) and perceived ad deceptiveness ($b = 1.63$, $p < .01$). However, ad deceptiveness mediated the interaction effect on brand evaluation (brand attitude: $b_{\text{interaction}} = .92$, $p < .02$; $b_{\text{ad deceptiveness}} = .40$, $p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 2.62$, $p < .01$; perceived quality: $b_{\text{interaction}} = .69$, $p < .06$; $b_{\text{ad deceptiveness}} = .38$, $p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 2.63$, $p < .01$). Similarly, PK thoughts marginally mediated the treatment effects on brand evaluations. The interaction effect was significant on PK thoughts ($b = -.84$, $p < .05$), and PK thoughts marginally mediated the interaction effect on brand evaluation (brand attitude: $b_{\text{interaction}} = 1.25$, $p < .01$; $b_{\text{PK thoughts}} = -.37$, $p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 1.84$, $p < .08$; perceived quality: $b_{\text{interaction}} = 1.07$, $p < .01$; $b_{\text{PK thoughts}} = -.28$, $p < .01$; Sobel: $Z = 1.62$, $p < .10$).

Diagnosticity versus desirability. To assess whether desirability or diagnosticity drove the treatment effects, we examined the results on the diagnosticity and desirability

measures. A 2×2 ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect on diagnosticity of manipulative intent ($F(1, 78) = 5.63$, $p < .02$). When suspicion was not primed, prevention-focused respondents considered the ad claim more diagnostic of manipulative intent than promotion-focused respondents ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.30$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.57$; $F(1, 78) = 8.25$, $p < .01$). When suspicion was primed, however, there was no difference across the two foci in terms of diagnosticity ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.50$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.29$; $F < 1$). Moreover, diagnosticity mediated the treatment effects on brand evaluations. Specifically, the regulatory focus \times prime interaction was significant on the diagnosticity measure ($b = -1.49$, $p < .02$), and diagnosticity mediated the interaction effect on brand evaluation (brand attitude: $b_{\text{interaction}} = 1.06$, $p < .01$; $b_{\text{diagnosticity}} = -.34$, $p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 2.16$, $p < .05$; perceived quality: $b_{\text{interaction}} = .82$, $p < .03$; $b_{\text{diagnosticity}} = -.33$, $p < .001$; Sobel: $Z = 2.17$, $p < .05$).

In contrast, there were no significant treatment effects on the desirability measure (all $ps > .39$), suggesting that promotion- and prevention-focused respondents had equivalent ratings of desirability ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 5.10$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.74$; $F < 1$). Thus, the underlying mechanism appears to be based on differences in diagnosticity, rather than desirability, of manipulative intent.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the results from the ambiguous-claim condition of Study 1 by showing that when suspicion was not externally primed, a promotion focus led to more favorable brand evaluations than a prevention focus. The study also shed light on the underlying process mechanism. When

generalized suspicion was primed through an article about corporate accounting fraud, the two regulatory foci led to similar brand evaluations. This suggests that whereas a prevention focus naturally generates vigilance, a promotion focus generates vigilance only when suspicion is made externally salient. Again, persuasion knowledge ratings and thoughts were shown to underlie these effects. Finally, differences in perceived diagnosticity, rather than desirability, of manipulative intent drove the results.

An issue raised by Study 2 is whether the suspicion manipulation may have triggered a prevention focus. If this were the case, the suspicion manipulation would have just been an alternative manipulation of regulatory focus. However, this is unlikely, given that the manipulation check on regulatory focus revealed a successful manipulation that was unaffected by the suspicion prime. Nevertheless, in Study 3, we examine formally whether a prevention focus is indeed distinct from suspicion.

We expect that whereas a prevention focus and suspicion may lead to similar results on tasks that trigger suspicion (e.g., the processing of ambiguous ad claims), they are likely to have different effects on other, nonsuspicious tasks because regulatory focus entails aspects other than suspicion, such as the use of different strategies to achieve goals and the preference for different product attributes. Prevention-focused people prefer to use avoiding mismatch strategies to achieve their goals, whereas promotion-focused people prefer to use approaching match strategies to attain their goals (Higgins 1997). Thus, prevention-focused people should prefer brands that offer prevention benefits, such as cavity prevention or safety, whereas promotion-focused people should prefer brands that offer promotion benefits, such as teeth whitening or energy. In contrast, people primed with suspicion are unlikely to exhibit differences in preference for product attributes; a suspicious person should be indifferent to whether a brand has promotion or prevention benefits. Therefore, we predict that respondents primed with a prevention focus and those primed with suspicion should respond similarly when processing ambiguous ad claims. However, they may behave differently when responding to non-suspicion-related tasks.

STUDY 3

The objective of Study 3 was to assess whether a prevention focus and suspicion have unique effects. The study was a between-subjects design with four conditions (promotion, prevention, suspicion, and no suspicion). Respondents were 115 undergraduate students at a large eastern university who participated for extra credit and were randomly assigned to conditions.

Respondents participated in a study that included several tasks. The first task entailed receiving one of the four manipulations (promotion, prevention, suspicion, or no suspicion). Participants in the first group (promotion focus) were asked to describe their hopes and ideals, as in Study 1; those in the second group (prevention focus) were asked to describe their duties and obligations, as in Study 1; those in the third group (suspicion primed) were asked to read and evaluate the corporate fraud newspaper article from Study 2; and those in the fourth group (suspicion not primed) were asked to read and evaluate the Volkswagen concept car article from Study 2.

To maintain consistency with the previous studies, respondents saw an advertisement for Calan camera after completing the first task. The advertisement was the same as that in Study 2 (see Appendix A), with the exception that the critical ambiguous claim (Paragraph 2) was deleted. Thus, the advertisement did not contain any mention of study results. We did this intentionally to provide a neutral advertisement that all respondents would see. Then, respondents were asked to complete a purportedly different task about brand preferences (Zhou and Pham 2004). They read descriptions of three pairs of brands and reported their preferences on a scale that ranged from 1 ("prefer Brand A") to 7 ("prefer Brand B"). In the first pair (grape juices), Brand A was rich in vitamin C and iron, thus promoting high energy (promotion benefit), and Brand B was rich in antioxidants, thus reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease (prevention benefit). In the second pair (toothpastes), Brand A was particularly good for cavity prevention (prevention benefit), and Brand B was particularly good for tooth whitening (promotion benefit). In the third pair (snacks), Brand A was a rich and tasty chocolate cake (promotion benefit), and Brand B was a healthy and fresh fruit salad (prevention benefit). We took the three sets of brand choices directly from the work of Zhou and Pham (2004). We coded responses to the items so that higher ratings indicated greater prevention than promotion benefits, and then we averaged them to form a composite measure. We expected that regulatory focus, but not suspicion, would affect these choices.

The second set of questions involved evaluating the manipulative intent of six ad claims. Respondents were asked to indicate on a seven-point scale whether each claim reflected an attempt to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means (1 = "not at all manipulative," and 7 = "extremely manipulative"). Three of the claims (the third, fifth, and sixth claims) were intended to be ambiguous with respect to manipulative intent, and the other three claims were intended to make manipulative intent less salient. The three ambiguous claims included the ambiguous claim from the prior studies ("In a recent study by *Consumer Reports*, consumers rated Calan as producing better quality pictures than the leading brand"), plus two more claims ("If you buy the Calan camera in the next two weeks, we'll send you a free carrying case," and "Calan's better than the rest"). We combined these claims to create an index of ambiguous claims ($\alpha = .70$). We expected differences across both regulatory focus and suspicion priming for this index. We expected the other three claims to be low in salience of manipulative intent ("This camera gives you 4 megapixel effective resolution and 3 \times optical zoom"; "Precision metering systems enable effortless shooting and provide sharp results"; and "The camera is stylish, light, and packed with the latest in user-friendly technology"). We combined these claims to create an index of unambiguous claims ($\alpha = .74$). We expected no treatment effects on this index.

Results

Brand preference. A one-way ANOVA on the brand preference task showed a significant main effect ($F(3, 111) = 2.69, p < .05$). Planned contrasts revealed that, as we expected, regulatory focus affected brand preference, but suspicion priming did not. Across the three pairs of brands, a promotion (prevention) focus led to greater preference for

the brand featuring promotion (prevention) benefits ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.20$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 5.07$; $t(111) = -2.63$, $p < .01$). Moreover, there were no significant differences on brand preference between the suspicion and the nonsuspicion conditions ($M_{\text{suspicion}} = 4.64$, $M_{\text{no suspicion}} = 4.37$; $t(111) = .86$, $p > .39$). Thus, regulatory focus affected brand preference, but suspicion did not. Table 3 shows the cell means.

Claims. Factor analysis confirmed that the six claims fell into the anticipated two factors. Thus, we performed analyses on the two claim indexes. A one-way ANOVA on the ambiguous-claims index revealed a significant treatment effect ($F(3, 111) = 3.20$, $p < .03$). Planned contrasts revealed that both regulatory focus and suspicion priming affected perceived manipulative intent of the claims. Specifically, a prevention focus led to perceptions of the claims as more manipulative than a promotion focus ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 4.29$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.99$; $t(111) = -2.17$, $p < .05$). In addition, the claims were perceived as more manipulative when suspicion was primed than when it was not primed ($M_{\text{suspicion}} = 4.80$, $M_{\text{no suspicion}} = 4.16$; $t(111) = 2.04$, $p < .05$). Thus, both suspicion priming and a prevention focus led to greater sensitivity to manipulative intent.

A one-way ANOVA on the index of unambiguous claims revealed no significant treatment effects ($F < 1$). As we expected, the claims were perceived as equally nonmanipulative under all four conditions ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 3.19$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.68$; $M_{\text{suspicion}} = 3.76$, $M_{\text{no suspicion}} = 3.49$). Thus, consistent with our expectations, neither suspicion priming nor regulatory focus affected the evaluation of unambiguous claims.

Discussion

The results from this study offer important insights about the difference between a prevention focus and suspicion. They demonstrate that suspicion is just one aspect of a prevention regulatory focus. When presented with ambiguous ad claims, prevention-focused respondents perceived the claims as more manipulative than promotion-focused respondents, and those primed with suspicion perceived the claims as more manipulative than those not primed with suspicion. In terms of ambiguous claims, therefore, a prevention focus and suspicion priming led to the same results. However, a prevention focus was distinct from suspicion in other aspects, such as preferred product attributes. Specifi-

cally, in a brand preference task, whereas prevention-focused (promotion-focused) respondents exhibited a preference for brands featuring prevention (promotion) benefits, suspicion-primed respondents were not expected nor found to differ from unprimed respondents. This indicates that though a prevention regulatory focus may lead to suspicion, suspicion does not necessarily lead to a prevention focus.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The objective of the article was to determine the conditions under which regulatory focus affected the activation and use of persuasion knowledge. The data supported our basic premise that a prevention focus leads to greater sensitivity to the advertiser's manipulative intent than a promotion focus. Study 1 demonstrated that compared with respondents with a promotion focus, prevention-focused respondents were more likely to activate persuasion knowledge and give less favorable brand evaluations when ad cues made manipulative intent moderately salient. In contrast, promotion-focused respondents activated persuasion knowledge only when message cues made manipulative intent highly salient. Study 2 replicated and extended these findings to show that the effects were due to differences in perceived diagnosticity, rather than desirability, of manipulative intent. Finally, Study 3 demonstrated that whereas a prevention focus may lead to suspicion, suspicion does not necessarily imply a prevention focus.

The results support the notion that regulatory focus affected the direction rather than the depth of processing (Pham and Avnet 2004). Message elaboration (i.e., involvement and total number of relevant thoughts) was equivalent across foci, suggesting the same depth of processing. However, prevention-focused respondents were more sensitive to being unduly manipulated than promotion-focused respondents, indicating differences in direction of processing. These findings have both theoretical and managerial implications.

Implications for Research and Practice

The article contributes to research on both persuasion knowledge and regulatory focus. A major contribution is to identify direction of processing, as indicated by regulatory focus, as an antecedent of persuasion knowledge activation. Prior research has suggested that cognitive capacity (depth

Table 3
STUDY 3: CELL MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

	Promotion Focus	Prevention Focus	Suspicion Primed	Suspicion Not Primed
Brand preference ^a	4.20 (1.07)	5.07 (1.21)	4.64 (.94)	4.37 (1.60)
Perceived manipulative intent of ambiguous claims ^b	4.29 (1.47)	4.99 (1.14)	4.80 (.99)	4.16 (1.16)
Perceived manipulative intent of unambiguous claims ^b	3.19 (1.50)	3.68 (1.20)	3.76 (1.30)	3.49 (1.36)
Cell sizes	27	29	28	31

^aMeasured on a seven-point scale; higher numbers indicate preference for prevention-focused brand.

^bMeasured on a seven-point scale; higher numbers indicate greater perceived manipulative intent.

Notes: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

of processing) is required to activate persuasion knowledge (Campbell and Kirmani 2000) because inferences of ulterior motives involve higher-order inferential processing. Our results indicate that even when depth of processing is constant, a prevention focus is more likely to lead to the activation of persuasion knowledge than a promotion focus. The reason is that prevention-focused people, who want to avoid being unduly persuaded, are more sensitive to manipulative intent than promotion-focused people. This enriches our understanding of the antecedents of persuasion knowledge, adding regulatory focus to other antecedents, such as cognitive resources, accessibility of motives, and persuasion expertise (see Campbell and Kirmani 2007).

The notion that prevention-focused people may try to avoid being unduly persuaded by an advertisement suggests that a prevention focus could lead to greater use of sentry coping strategies (Kirmani and Campbell 2004). In a study of consumers' persuasion coping behaviors, Kirmani and Campbell (2004) describe two general approaches by consumer targets for dealing with interpersonal persuasion agents. Targets behaving as goal seekers attempted to use the persuasion agent to achieve their own purchase-related goals, whereas targets behaving as persuasion sentries attempted to achieve their purchase-related goals by guarding against unwanted persuasion. Sentry strategies, reflecting the desire to avoid being unduly persuaded, included forestalling, deception, assertive resistance, confrontation, punishment, withdrawal, preparation, and enlisting a companion. Our research suggests that sentry strategies may be more likely to be used in a prevention focus, whereas seeker strategies may be more likely to be used in a promotion focus. This would extend our findings beyond the advertising context to interpersonal persuasion. Further research might examine the link between regulatory focus and persuasion coping strategies.

Another contribution of this article is to demonstrate that general suspicion of companies can affect processing of advertising. Darke and Ritchie (2007) show that when people learn that they have been personally deceived by an advertisement, their distrust spills over to advertisements from other advertisers. We describe a much more general phenomenon. Our suspicion manipulation was different from theirs in two important ways: (1) People were not personally deceived by the suspicion-arousing stimulus, and (2) the suspicion-arousing stimulus was an article that mentioned corporate financial fraud and thus was unrelated to advertising. Our studies show that simply learning that a company's CEO lied about profitability can make people suspicious about ambiguous ad claims from a different company. This indicates that consumers may respond negatively to advertising or other persuasion attempts when corporate fraud is salient, as in a television news show that describes deceptive financial practices. From a managerial point of view, placing advertisements in movies or television shows that make corporate fraud salient (e.g., *The Smartest Guys in the Room* and *Dateline* or *60 Minutes* segments on the Enron fraud) might trigger suspicion of advertisements or even product placements in the movie or television show environment. It would be useful to examine the boundaries of this phenomenon. For example, we speculate that consumers may be suspicious of advertising claims when suspicion is triggered even in a nonbusiness context, such as a movie about political fraud (e.g., *Wag the Dog*).

The article also contributes to the regulatory focus literature. It identifies suspicious processing of marketing stimuli as a potential outcome of a prevention focus. This adds suspicion to other possible outcomes identified by prior research, such as sensitivity to gains and losses (Aaker and Lee 2001). More broadly, our research suggests that regulatory focus leads to differential activation of persuasion knowledge. Because prevention-focused people are more vigilant against manipulation than promotion-focused people, they are more likely to perceive ambiguous ad claims as diagnostic of manipulative intent and, consequently, to activate persuasion knowledge and form less favorable brand evaluations. Note that it is possible that manipulative intent is more accessible to prevention-focused people than to promotion-focused people, and this greater accessibility could lead to greater perceived diagnosticity. Further research could explore this relationship in detail.

From a managerial point of view, this suggests that using ad headlines that might trigger a prevention focus (e.g., a headline for CIT Group stating, "Help you avoid hazards") might also make readers more suspicious of ambiguous ad claims. Consequently, consumers may be more vigilant or skeptical when processing the advertisement, particularly if the advertisement contains information about test results or negative comparisons. In other words, although a prevention focus may be useful for certain types of effects (e.g., encouraging processing of detailed or unique information; Zhu and Meyers-Levy 2007), it may backfire if the advertisement contains ambiguous claims. Advertisers must be cautious in inducing a prevention focus in the presence of copy that might be interpreted negatively.

Furthermore, the results from Study 2 suggest that external priming can activate suspicion among promotion-focused people and therefore can cause them to behave similarly to prevention-focused people. Further research might examine whether it is possible to suppress the suspicion of prevention-focused people when they process advertisements with ambiguous claims so that they might behave similarly to promotion-focused people. For example, if prevention-focused people are highly suspicious, it may be possible to design advertisements to reduce the suspicion by including reassuring information. Indeed, we speculate that first presenting an ambiguous claim and then qualifying that claim in a reassuring way may be a particularly successful ad strategy for prevention-focused people.

Limitations

As with any lab study, caution must be exercised before generalizing these results to situations beyond those studied. In all our studies, regulatory focus was primed before respondents were presented with the target advertisement, which might not be feasible or realistic in the marketplace. Thus, it would be worthwhile to explore whether regulatory focus induced through ad exposure, such as message framing, has similar effects to those observed here.

Finally, the article does not examine the conceptual issue of what constitutes an ambiguous ad claim. We defined ambiguous claims as those with moderately salient manipulative intent and used a pretest to identify the target ambiguous claim. Prior literature has suggested that ad claims differ in terms of consumer skepticism (Ford, Smith, and Swasy 1990). Subjective claims generate greater skepticism

than objective claims, and experience claims generate greater skepticism than search claims. This suggests that ambiguous claims are likely to be somewhat subjective and

not immediately verifiable. Further research might more systematically examine which claims may make manipulative intent moderately accessible.

Appendix A ADVERTISEMENTS FOR STUDY 1

A: Moderate Salience of Manipulative Intent

Introducing Calan Digital Camera



Stylish, light, and packed with the latest in user-friendly technology, Calan gives you 4 megapixel effective resolution, 3x optical zoom, and precision metering systems that allow effortless shooting and provide sharp results.

In a recent study conducted by *Consumer Reports*, consumers rated Calan as producing better quality pictures than the leading brand.

Whether shooting in full-auto mode to capture the scene quickly or using one of the camera's special scene modes, Calan will surely exceed your expectations.

For more information, visit us today at www.calan.com

B: High Salience of Manipulative Intent

Introducing Calan Digital Camera



Stylish, light, and packed with the latest in user-friendly technology, Calan gives you 4 megapixel effective resolution, 3x optical zoom, and precision metering systems that allow effortless shooting and provide sharp results.


In a recent study conducted by Calan, consumers rated Calan as producing better quality pictures than the leading brand.

Whether shooting in full-auto mode to capture the scene quickly or using one of the camera's special scene modes, Calan will surely exceed your expectations.

For more information, visit us today at www.calan.com

C: Low Salience of Manipulative Intent

Introducing Calan Digital Camera



Stylish, light, and packed with the latest in user-friendly technology, Calan gives you 4 megapixel effective resolution, 3x optical zoom, and precision metering systems that allow effortless shooting and provide sharp results.

In a recent study conducted by *Consumer Reports*, consumers rated Calan as producing better quality pictures than leading brands, such as Canon and Kodak.

Whether shooting in full-auto mode to capture the scene quickly or using one of the camera's special scene modes, Calan will surely exceed your expectations.

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APPENDIX B: STUDY 2 PRIMES

*Suspicion Primed***Company Found Fabricating Financial Data**

A recent news article about Mintos, Inc., a producer of semi-conductor products used in the information technology industry, reported that the company was a success story. In the article, the CEO of the company was quoted as saying, "Mintos, Inc. has been extremely profitable ... with profits increasing by \$20 million over the last two quarters." Accounting auditors have since then reviewed the financial statements of Mintos Inc. and found that the financial figures were fabricated. In fact, the company's profits were actually down by approximately \$37 million over the entire year. Company executives have declined to comment.

*Suspicion Not Primed***VW Crossover Concept Combines Sports Car Design with SUV Elements**

Volkswagen has revealed its latest design study, the Concept A, a crossover between a sports car and a compact SUV. The concept combines a sleek coupe-style silhouette with the raised stance of an SUV. Designed to respond to customer demand, the concept is powered by a 150 hp Twincharger, with a six gear transmission and an all-wheel drive system. As one company executive put it, "We're at the forefront of crossover technology. This concept is likely to find its way into production soon ... design changes will certainly happen in response to consumer testing."

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