Abstract

Persuasion researchers have long known that the order in which the same arguments are presented in a message can influence its efficacy. However, evidence remains conflicted as to why the order of the same arguments in a persuasive appeal are more or less effective. In this paper, we propose that individuals hold expectations regarding the order in which arguments are most effectively presented—expectations grounded in beliefs about message recipients’ ability to attend to the persuasive appeal. Moreover, we predict that messages that violate these expectations paradoxically invoke greater processing and thus generate greater persuasion. We present three experiments in support of these hypotheses and thus demonstrate the importance of consumers’ expectations about the structure of persuasive messages in determining the efficacy of different argument orders.