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THE PRESENT AND FUTURE LANDSCAPE OF PERSONALIZED PERSUASION

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As old a practice and research domain as personalized persuasion is (see Luttrell et al., Chapter 1), its implementation continues to expand and become more sophisticated. Over half a century of formal research into the topic—and centuries further back describing its intuitive advantage—has detailed much about how and when personalized persuasion works. Whether this entails tailoring one's communication to the intended recipient via the *message* content, the *source* of the message, or the *context* in which the message is delivered, recipient-relevant appeals are a proven tactic for enhancing an appeal's persuasiveness. Although personalization can sometimes backfire (e.g., overly personalized messages can trigger negative reactions; David et al., 2012; Reinhart et al., 2007; Van Doorn & Hoekstra, 2013), aligning one's attempt at influence with some aspect of whom it targets has generally enhanced the appeal's effectiveness.

In this handbook, we and our chapter authors strove to codify the key conclusions from the science of personalized persuasion. Although we could not be exhaustive, our goal was to elucidate some of the most promising and studied variables in this area of research as well as the important domains in which personalized persuasion has been leveraged. More specifically, the first half of the book detailed many of the fundamental characteristics of message recipients to which appeals can be personalized. For example, a message, source, or context can be more or less congruent with the functions served by the attitude (Joyal-Desmarais et al., Chapter 2), the affective versus cognitive nature of the recipient's attitude (Aquino et al., Chapter 3), the construal level (Le & Fujita, Chapter 4), the motivational orientation (Lee, Chapter 5), the moral values (Luttrell, Chapter 6), the person's social identity

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(Fleming, Chapter 7), the cultural lens through which they view the world (Shavitt, Chapter 8), and the intended outcome of persuasion (Albarracin & Zhou, Chapter 9). Each of these recipient characteristics has inspired a rich body of research on ways in which communication factors can match these variables to enhance an appeal's influence.

In the second half of the book, the authors demonstrated how these variables have been used across different applied domains to increase the impact of health messages (Rothman et al., Chapter 10), political communications (Druckman, Chapter 11), consumer marketing campaigns (Teeny, Chapter 12), environmental sustainability initiatives (Goldberg & Gustafson, Chapter 13), calls for inclusion in educational institutions (Pietri et al., Chapter 14), prejudice reduction interventions (Hebel-Sela et al., Chapter 15), misinformation (Susmann et al., Chapter 16), and social media discourse (Vaid et al., Chapter 17). The penultimate chapter then presents a discussion of the mechanisms of personalized persuasion that can operate regardless of the type of matching or the domain in which it is applied (Briñol & Petty, Chapter 18). Taken together, this book offers insight for both theory and practice on personalized persuasion, organizing the diverse perspectives on the topic as well as generating important questions for future research. In this concluding chapter, we summarize some of the key themes that emerged across the various chapters and offer ideas and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical Insights and Themes

One of the reasons that personalized persuasion has long been considered such a promising communication strategy is because it taps into one of the most foundational aspects of the human mind: the sense of self. From an evolutionary perspective, the human brain is adapted to pay attention to information that is relevant to oneself (Petersen & Posner, 2012). Whether that is a nearby noise in the brush or an email subject line that uses one's name, information deemed relevant to our own nurturance or safety is given mental priority. For example, neuroscientific research shows that a region of the brain (the medial prefrontal cortex) is specialized for processing and heeding self-relevant information (Petersen & Posner, 2012; Kelley et al., 2002) and has been shown to be associated with personalized persuasion effects specifically (Aquino et al., 2020). From a behavioral perspective, the robust phenomenon of "the cocktail party effect" (i.e., recognizing one's name within a din) reflects the premium we place on this type of information (Howard & Kerin, 2011; Sahni et al., 2018). Indeed, much research has supported the idea that invoking self-relevance can enhance memory for self-linked information (Rogers et al., 1977) as well as information processing of it (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). Thus, it should come as no surprise that personalizing one's

persuasive attempt to the message recipient in some form tends to enhance its persuasive influence.

As just described, the present book details many recipient characteristics that have extensive research in the personalized persuasion space. However, despite how widespread research on personalized persuasion is, the many individual studies on this topic often emerged independent of other seemingly relevant work. Part of the reason for this, as described in the opening chapter, is that "personalized persuasion" has gone by many different names (e.g., matching, targeting, tailoring, segmenting, etc.). Moreover, different research teams have been interested in either particular kinds of personalized matching or in particular domains in which this matching was applied. As a result, many studies that were not classified as personalized persuasion were indeed illustrating evidence of it, and an integrated perspective that cuts across different variables and domains has been slow to develop. The present book, then, helps to situate the different terms and applications under a single organizing framework.

In uniting a body of research that has often developed in independent streams of work, this book highlights themes that raise important questions for the next generation of research on personalized persuasion. Here, we present several ideas that appeared across multiple chapters as well as some novel ones and point out their potential for inspiring new research questions.

Ways in Which a "Match" Matches a Recipient

Several chapters highlighted various considerations regarding what it means for a variable within a communication to "match" (or be personalized to) a recipient. Here, we draw attention to two important dimensions of a matched variable that we discussed in the opening chapter (Luttrell et al., Chapter 1) that could influence persuasion outcomes.

First, we highlight the *breadth* of the matching variable. This refers to the conceptual ordinance of a variable, where variables with greater breadth are more superordinate in a conceptual hierarchy. For example, imagine a consumer bases an attitude toward cars primarily on affect (emotions). "Affect," here is a variable relatively high in breadth, because there are many subordinate variables (e.g., specific emotions) that fall within it (excitement, peace, danger, etc.). In contrast, a specific emotion, like contentedness, has less breadth, because it is conceptually lower (i.e., narrower) than affect in general (cf., Rosch, 1978). This could mean that personalization effects might be stronger the narrower the variable being matched. For example, when research has found effects for matching messages to moral bases but not practical bases (Luttrell et al., 2019), it might be that the category of morality is narrower in scope (has fewer subcategories) than a person's sense of practicality. A similar case might be made for research on affect-cognition

matching, where affective matches have historically driven personalization effects (Edwards, 1990; Fabrigar & Petty, 1999). That is, one's emotions might be a narrower variable relative to one's cognitive reactions, meaning affective bases can be more easily personalized. Furthermore, personalizing a message to one of the subordinate categories that is valued by the recipient (e.g., purity for morality; anger for emotion) might be more effective than personalizing the message to the broader category. At the same time, broader variables and appeals might also allow the messaging practitioner to make more dynamic or multi-faceted appeals, because there are many subordinate variables to which to match an appeal. Future research is still needed to know exactly how a variable's overall breadth impacts personalized persuasion effects.

Second, is the *generalizability* of a matched variable. Separate from its breadth, generalizability refers to the degree to which the alignment of a variable with a recipient is topic- or domain-specific. Matched variables with greater generalizability are ones that produce alignment for the recipient even when enacted across different topics or domains. For example, a consumer might really like the color midnight blue. If this variable (midnight blue) has high generalizability, this means that a message for a midnight blue coat, a midnight blue car, or even an advertisement that uses midnight blue imagery would be a match for the consumer. In contrast, if the consumer only liked midnight blue when it applied to cars (and felt neutral or even negative toward it in other domains, like fashion), it would have low generalizability. Generally, personalized persuasion researchers have assumed high generalizability of the variables they study, where self-reports of positivity toward a variable mean it will be a "match" in any context to which it is applied. However, it could be that a matched variable has high relevance in one domain but low or no relevance in others (i.e., low generalizability), thus making matches to it in the relevant domain feel highly personalized (and thereby more effective). At the same time, matched variables with low generalizability mean it will have lower effectiveness for personalization across different domains or that it might be a relatively unimportant characteristic to the message recipient. Notably, both broad (e.g., morality) and narrow (e.g., purity) matching variables can be relatively high or low in generalizability. Thus, future research should consider a match's generalizability in testing personalization effects in addition to breadth as well as the theoretical underpinnings of when a variable has more or less generalizability.

The Impact of Matching versus Mismatching

For much of the research on personalized persuasion, the influence of this approach has been attributed to the enhanced persuasiveness of the matched message, rather than the neutral or diminished persuasiveness of the mismatched message. However, as explained in Chapter 1, mismatched messages

can either be *non-matches* (a generic persuasive appeal) or *mismatches* (a persuasive appeal that aligns with the dimensions opposite to that of the recipient). These two types of comparison messages could have different persuasive impacts, entailing different interpretations for the effectiveness of matched messages. For example, although it has long been assumed that matched messages enhance persuasion, it could be that mismatched messages simply backfire, making matched messages by contrast seem persuasive. At this time, it is unclear how much of personalization effects are driven by matches or mismatches because the appropriate neutral control conditions (non-matches) have infrequently been employed. For example, consider a case in which a person is more passionately against the candidate for the non-preferred party than in favor of the candidate for the preferred party (e.g., Siev et al., 2024). In such instances where the mismatched message represents an identity or dimension the recipient actively dislikes (e.g., a message endorsed by the Democratic candidate is directed at a Republican), it might generate a stronger negative effect on persuasion compared to the positive effect that a matched message generates (e.g., a message endorsed by the Republican candidate directed at a Republican). In contrast, if the message recipient has no opposition toward the mismatched dimension (e.g., an extravert receives a message targeted toward introverts where there is no dislike of introverts), then it might be the matched message that is more likely to generate the enhanced persuasion with no special disadvantage for the mismatched message.

In short, there could be an important distinction in whether matching or mismatching effects are found as a function of whether the ends of the targeted variables are liked (or identified with) more versus disliked (or disidentified with) less. As noted, without a non-match (neutral control) condition with which to compare matched to mismatched messages, the direction of personalized persuasion effects is very difficult to establish (Joyal-Desmarais et al., Chapter 2; see also Luttrell & Trentadue, 2024). Of course, creating a pure control message that neither matches nor mismatches the recipient is tricky in its own right; however, including such messages would aid significantly in greater understanding of personalization effects.

Psychological Processes of Personalization Effects

Although some scholars have offered theoretical frameworks for understanding the psychological process(es) behind personalized persuasion in general (see Briñol and Petty, Chapter 18; Teeny et al., 2021), most of the research on personalization has examined its influence without considering *why* it has such influence. However, only by having a firmer understanding of its mechanism can a broader theory for its impact be established, helping to guide the use of personalized persuasion in the field. Returning to the prior section, this is one reason why studies with non-matched messages can be so important: they

can allow researchers to better determine whether the matched versus mismatched message drove any effects, pinpointing whether the relevant mechanism operated by increasing or decreasing a psychological process.

So far, one prominent line of research shows that the extent of recipients' elaboration of the message (i.e., the extent of thinking about it) can be a critical mechanism in producing personalized persuasion effects. For example, various forms of matched (vs. mismatched) messages have been shown to increase elaboration (Dimmock et al., 2013; Fujita et al., 2008; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Wan & Rucker, 2013; Wheeler et al., 2005; see Teeny et al., 2021, for a review). The enhanced thinking from matching, when paired with strong arguments, leads to enhanced persuasion; but, when paired with weak arguments, it leads to reduced persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). At present, it is still unclear whether the matched message increases elaboration, the mismatched one decreases it, or both, preventing researchers from understanding what about personalization affects elaboration (e.g., an increased/decreased ability or motivation to engage with the message).

Moreover, other research on occasion has found the *reverse* effects, where mismatched (vs. matched) messages produce greater elaboration of the message, thereby producing corresponding effects with the strength of the arguments (Millar & Millar, 1990; Smith & Petty, 1996). Researchers have speculated on when matching versus mismatching is more likely to enhance elaboration (e.g., if the matched content is already familiar to recipients, it lowers elaboration; Teeny et al., 2021); however, no empirical evidence to which we are aware has tested this. Because much of the literature on personalized persuasion has taken its influence for granted, this means that researchers have often also taken its mechanism for granted. However, to truly build a robust theory on the influence of personalized persuasion, more empirical work is needed to test when certain processes (e.g., enhanced elaboration) are more or less likely to operate. Although the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) explains how different mechanisms are more likely to be responsible for matching effects in different situations (Petty et al., 2000; Teeny et al., 2021; see Briñol & Petty, Chapter 18), more research is needed to provide a truly comprehensive theory of personalized persuasion.

Applied Insights and Themes

One of the reasons that personalized persuasion has maintained such academic interest is because of its direct, practical implications. With attitude change being a fundamental aspect in nearly every area of life, personalized persuasion has been utilized in nearly every domain of life from consumer marketing (Teeny, Chapter 12) to political influence (Druckman, Chapter 11) to many others. Although this book directly covers many of the most popular

domains where personalized persuasion has been studied, the chapters are not exhaustive of personalization's applied potential. For example, practitioners in clinical and counseling psychology often use personalized strategies at the individual level to enhance the uptake of their clinical advice (Cameron, 2009; Musiat et al., 2012). In particular, "motivational interviewing" employs tenants of personalized persuasion to encourage message recipients to attempt and persist at the therapeutic practices advised to them (Hettema et al., 2005). Of course, this is only one example. Many other domains, such as organizational communication (Canning et al., 2020; Wallace et al., 2023) and negotiation (Taylor & Thomas, 2008), also find enhanced influence when unique features of recipients match the message, source, or context.

The Effective Matches in Applied Domains

Across all of the domains covered in this volume, one thing was clear: Employing personalized persuasion can be an effective influence technique. Notably, different domains sometimes focus on the effectiveness of specific kinds of matches. For example, in the political area, much of the research documented the effectiveness of matching the politicized content of a message with the political views of the recipient (e.g., the moral foundations generally endorsed by this group). In the consumer domain, much of the literature focused on matching the hedonic (emotional) or utilitarian (cognitive) elements of a message to a consumer's attitude toward the product or brand. This might suggest that certain variables are more likely to produce personalization effects as a function of the domain—a potentially valuable consideration for one domain covered in this volume that reported more mixed success for personalization effects, environmentalism (Goldberg & Gustafson, Chapter 13). At this time, it is unclear why matched appeals might be less effective in this domain; however, future research could consider if there is a class of variables that does have more consistent success. Other possibilities include differences in the methodologies employed in this literature (e.g., the quality of the personalization in the messages), differences between the persuasive messages and the outcome of interest, and other elements that might be unique to this domain (e.g., the consequences of one's environmental attitude are often difficult to realize in the moment or will not be realized until much later in the future). Even so, there is still a wide range of studies that have shown personalized persuasion to be effective for environmental messaging in line with the other domains.

Irrespective of the different variables used to instantiate matching across the domains, there was consistency in the communication *factors* employed to create matches. In practice, by and large, personalized persuasion has focused on matching elements of the *message* or *source* to the recipient; though, in some domains one type of matching seemed more prevalent than in others. Noticeably

absent across domains was a documentation of personalized matches between the context and the recipient. This is likely due in part to the practical difficulties in personalizing a context to a recipient. Outside of the digital world, modifying the physical context surrounding message recipients is difficult if not impossible, and selecting contexts to match specific recipients can be a relatively coarse form of personalization. As alluded, however, the digital frontier offers new possibilities in personalizing the context around an appeal (see Vaid et al., Chapter 17). For example, the metaverse offers a fully customizable virtual context, where practitioners could tailor the world around users (e.g., the lighting within a digital store, the computerized avatars populating a given area) to better match and enhance the effectiveness of an appeal. Indeed, a burgeoning field of communication science has been considering personalized communication in a virtual reality environment (Lim et al., 2024), and further work could consider how different recipients or different types of appeals might exhibit stronger personalized persuasion effects as a consequence of context matching.

Creating Personalized Persuasive Appeals

In addition to knowing which variables to match upon and with which communication variables to produce the match, message practitioners have another important consideration: how to materially communicate the match to the recipient. Across the applied chapters, two key dimensions emerged with respect to this practical consideration (see also Luttrell et al., Chapter 1). First, matched appeals can vary in the *directness* with which they instantiate the match. That is, some message, source, or context features of an appeal are quite closely connected to the recipient's targeted characteristic, whereas other features of an appeal are more distally related. This dimension is very prominent in political personalization (see Druckman, Chapter 11). For example, a relatively direct match would occur when recipients who are Republican or Democrat see a message that explicitly highlights whether a policy has been endorsed by Republicans or Democrats, respectively (e.g., Endres, 2020). In contrast, a more indirect match would be when a Republican or Democratic recipient sees a message grounded in loyalty versus fairness values, respectively. In this case, the message does not explicitly highlight partisanship but instead matches the recipients via the values typically prioritized between Republicans and Democrats (e.g., Voelkel & Feinberg, 2018). At times, there might be practical reasons to instantiate a match more directly (e.g., if there is high urgency behind the message) or indirectly (e.g., if addressing a sensitive topic); however, at this time, research has not articulated when one approach might be more effective than the other.

Second, matches can be instantiated with varied *salience*. That is, some connections between recipients and other factors of communication are quite

blatant and prominent, whereas others are more subtle. For example, for a fitness enthusiast, a more salient form of personalization would be a message printed in large type saying that a product was designed for fitness enthusiasts. A less salient form would be to simply picture a dumbbell in the message (an icon associated with fitness). Notably, in this example, both the blatant and subtle matches are direct matches (i.e., they are closely connected to the matched variable of "fitness"). However, indirect matches could similarly differ in salience. For example, if we assume that fitness enthusiasts tend to like nature, a blatant indirect match would be a message boldly claiming that Product X is great for people who love to be out in nature. A subtle indirect match would be presenting the advertisement with imagery from nature in the background. In short, directness and salience are conceptually independent, and they each might have important implications for persuasion processes and outcomes. For example, although matching a communication to a recipient's social identity can be effective (see Fleming, Chapter 7), doing so too directly or too blatantly could backfire (David et al., 2012; Derricks & Earl, 2019; Kim et al., 2019a; White et al., 2008). To the best of our knowledge, like directness, no research to which we are aware has tested the influence of salience empirically, offering fertile ground for future research.

Implementing Personalized Persuasive Appeals

The practical challenge of matching a context to a recipient (above) represents a broader obstacle faced by messaging strategists: the communicator's ability to deploy the tailored appeal to whom it is matched. For many communicators, their goal is not to influence a single person but a widespread group of people. Such communication at scale, however, requires that communicators understand how to identify and then specifically reach a unique segment of message recipients within a given channel of communication (e.g., direct mail, television, social media platforms, etc.). A communication channel with *low segmentation* is one in which lots of disparate people see the communication. For example, a TV commercial during the Super Bowl (the U.S. football championship) has low segmentation, because viewers vary greatly in their demographics, backgrounds, etc. This means that a personalized advertisement during the Super Bowl would result in a large proportion of message recipients being mismatched or non-matched to the message, though some variables might match the population at large. In contrast, a communication channel with *high segmentation* means a sizable group of similar people will view the message. For example, a TV commercial during a pre-season football game would likely have high segmentation, because these dedicated football fans align not only in their strong positive attitudes toward football but potentially in other dimensions, too. Thus, a message personalized to

football fans during this game could result in a smaller proportion of message recipients being mismatched or non-matched to the personalized message.

Although certain factors can moderate the segmentation of any given communication channel (e.g., the example of a TV ad during the Super Bowl versus a pre-season game), certain communication channels also naturally have more and less segmentation. For example, billboards are observed by disparate passersby, generally entailing low segmentation. By contrast, personal sellers (e.g., in a store or a used car lot) are typically interacting with a single person, meaning the highest segmentation. One of the ongoing debates in the applied domains, then, is how to balance the goals of mass communication with the tendency for channels that offer this (e.g., national TV, prominent outdoor messaging) to have low segmentation (i.e., any personalized message on them could be non- or counter-personalized for a large portion of recipients). This is a particularly thorny issue for cases where counter-personalized messages could produce backfire effects. For example, imagine an environmental communicator who wants to deploy at scale a pro-environmental message that is personalized to political conservatives. To do this, they design a message that shows conservative politicians supporting relevant policies. Although this personalized message could enhance pro-environmental behaviors among conservatives, releasing it on a large scale but low segmentation channel will likely result in politically liberal recipients seeing the (counter-personalized) message, too, potentially reducing their pro-environmental behaviors.

To help balance mass messaging alongside segmentation issues, message practitioners have increasingly turned to digital communication channels (e.g., email, social media ads), which allow for both large-scale deployment as well as high segmentation in targeting particular individuals. Yet, this approach faces its own considerations, namely, the cost of resources involved in hyper-personalizing messages to a wide swath of recipients. That is, it requires time and resources to understand and design a message that matches a niche segment or specific recipient. Thus, the resources required to do this must be weighed against the incremental persuasive gain of hyper-personalizing messages relative to a generic message that could be deployed uniformly. For example, it would require a lot of effort and money to find and use a message source that was most credible to each individual recipient or each small segment within a messaging campaign. So, would it simply be more cost-effective to select a source that had at least moderate credibility across the majority of the audience? Although advances in generative artificial intelligence are reducing the resources required to personalize messages (Matz et al., 2024; Vaid et al., Chapter 17), human authors are still needed at present to oversee and correct these tailored appeals to ensure they adequately capture the intended characteristics. In the end, the best approach may lie somewhere in the middle—segmenting one's recipients into the smallest number of subgroups for which it is reasonably feasible to personalize.

Future Directions in Personalized Persuasion

Although the present volume offers the most up-to-date findings, theorizing, and applications of personalized persuasion, many more questions remain to be addressed. Broadly, we suggest three areas of research that deserve greater consideration: the most effective types of matches, combining different matches, and matching backfire effects.

Making Personalization More Persuasive

Although there has been much work showing that personalized persuasion can be effective, there has been far less theory describing the kinds of personalized messages that are more or less effective. Already, we have discussed some dimensions of matches that could matter in this respect (i.e., the match's *breadth* and *generalizability*) as well as the consequences of how that match is materially implemented (i.e., its *directness* and *salience*). Here, we draw attention to two more dimensions of personalized appeals that could affect their influence.

First is the *uniqueness* of the matched variable. Uniqueness refers to how distinct or uncommon the matched variable is for the recipient relative to other people. For example, personalizing a message to "dog owners" is less unique than a message personalized to "mini-Australian shepherd owners," because there are a fewer number of people who see themselves in respect to this latter characteristic. It is worth noting that uniqueness is related to but distinct from the breadth of the match (i.e., its categorical super- or subordinance) as more narrow matches will also tend to be more unique. However, the two are conceptually orthogonal. For example, more people might care about the relatively narrow moral dimension of purity than the broader construct of morality. Furthermore, a match's uniqueness is context-dependent, whereas a match's breadth is fixed. Thus, if people receive a message personalized to their disposition to value individualism (a relatively broad variable) in a country where people primarily have collectivistic dispositions, the match would still be broad but unique compared to receiving the same message in a country full of other individualists. More unique personalized messages might enhance persuasion as they could feel more self-relevant and fluent (positive meanings; Hanus & Fox, 2017; Maslowska et al., 2011; Uskul & Oyserman, 2010; see Noar et al., 2007). At the same time, they could also backfire for the reasons outlined elsewhere (e.g., produce a negative meaning for message recipients, such as making the message feel suspiciously personalized). Regardless, uniqueness, like two of the other dimensions we've described in this chapter, breadth and generalizability, constitute what "personalizes" an appeal.

When a matched appeal has low breadth (i.e., is categorically narrow), is low in generalizability (i.e., the match is restricted to a specific context), and

is high in uniqueness (i.e., a fewer number of others share this matched characteristic), the message is highly personalized. Thus, the more these three dimensions can be implemented in this manner, the more self-congruent a personal appeal would be to the message recipient, potentially enhancing any relevant psychological process and subsequent outcomes. Of course, over-personalization could produce negative (rather than positive) meanings for the message recipient (see Briñol & Petty, Chapter 18), neutralizing or even counteracting any positive persuasive effect.

Before concluding this section, we want to mention a final variable that can impact the effectiveness of personalized messages—the matched variable's *importance* to the recipient. More important variables (e.g., characteristics more central to how they see themselves; social groups that people highly value or aspire to associate with) can serve as more effective matches than less important variables (e.g., peripheral characteristics or social groups with which they have only weak ties; Fleming & Petty, 2000; Fleming, Chapter 7; see also Teeny et al., 2021; Teeny, Chapter 12). Although it seems intuitive that variables important to a person would demonstrate greater personalization effects (as these variables often drive other sorts of behavior; Eaton & Visser, 2008), it is also possible that these variables' enhanced importance could lead to greater scrutiny of the message, requiring stronger arguments for positive persuasive effects (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979), or even produce backfire effects if recipients are negative toward that variable's usage (van Doorn & Hoekstra, 2013). For example, some important variables, such as one's religious beliefs, are perceived as taboo when used in certain domains of personalized persuasion, like consumer advertising. That is, consumers generally do not like to have "sacred values," such as their religion, referenced in commercial messaging (Tetlock et al., 2000).

In sum, we want to emphasize that these distinctions we introduced between ways of matching are not strictly to invent a taxonomy of matching. Instead, we present them as theoretical levers that can be tested and applied in advancing the understanding on the science of personalized persuasion.

Appeals with Multiple Matches

Building off the prior discussion, another area worthy of future research is how matching to multiple characteristics of the message recipient might influence the effectiveness of personalized persuasion. To some extent, this returns to the discussion above, a question about the optimal degree of personalization. Some research has shown that matching a message to two traits (vs. one) can enhance persuasion (Joyal-Desmarais et al., 2020; Kalyanaraman & Sundar, 2006; Strecher et al., 2008), whereas other research has found that matching a message to many variables (vs. one) does not improve outcomes (Hackenburg & Margetts, 2024) and can even backfire (van Doorn

& Hoekstra, 2013). So, what is the optimal number of traits to match? And should these different variables be related in some way? Most research on personalized persuasion has considered how tailoring an appeal to a single variable can enhance persuasion, so these remain as largely open questions within this literature. Based on the earlier speculation regarding the personalization of the appeal, receiving a multiply matched message could enhance persuasion by making the appeal feel like a better fit (i.e., more precise to them). However, this might notably depend on the inter-relation of these variables. In the research that provided some preliminary evidence for this finding and claim (Joyal-Desmarais et al., 2020), the variables chosen were internally related (promotion focus and interdependent self-construal). Thus, it might be the case that multiply matched variables work when they themselves are "matched" in some way, creating a fuller sense of balance between the recipient, the communication, *and* between the elements of the communication (Heider, 1958). In some instances, two variables that might each be effective when used as single matches to a recipient could be in conflict when used jointly (e.g., appealing to one's identity as both a parent and a professional). Again, further research is needed in this area to develop a more comprehensive strategy for this approach to personalization.

When Mismatches Are Persuasive

Just as multiple matches in a single appeal might enhance persuasion, another question in this literature is when *mismatched* appeals might enhance persuasion. This was a topic that emerged across various chapters, but even still, there is no consistent theory for when to expect positive mismatch effects. In general, when a match creates a negative meaning for the customer, such as suggesting their data was collected improperly (Kim et al., 2019a) or the message is tailored to a stigmatized identity (Derricks & Earl, 2019; Kim et al., 2019b), personalized appeals can impair persuasion. However, there are also cases where a match does not detract from persuasion, while a mismatched message enhances it. For example, sometimes a matched appeal does not increase elaboration because the match signals to the recipient that the content of the appeal is already known. Consequently, people are more persuaded by strong arguments from mismatched messages, because they are assumed to offer novel arguments (Clark et al., 2008). This highlights the importance of the question, *what does the match mean to the person?* (see Briñol & Petty, Chapter 18; Teeny et al., 2021). As technologies allow for greater and greater personalization of more and more variables, a systematic understanding of when to expect matching versus mismatching effects is critical. Likely, understanding such effects will relate back to better understanding whether positive persuasion effects are due to the enhanced influence of matching versus the undermining influence of mismatching.

Greater insight on the aforementioned points will also inform a final consideration in the personalization literature, which concerns the impact of messages that contain some elements that match the recipient and other elements that mismatch them. In light of the evidence for personalized persuasion and the diversity among potential message recipients, practitioners may reasonably assume that the ideal strategy might be to include a little of something for everyone. For instance, if some people are more persuaded by emotion and others are more persuaded by reason, why not develop a message with both emotional and rational content? If the mismatch in the message does not harm the appeal's effectiveness, then including multiple elements in a message, each of which resonates with different audiences, could be a strategically effective approach. In effect, this would result in a single message that "matches" a broader range of recipients. Indeed, researchers have speculated on this as a potential strategy (Luttrell & Petty, 2021), the promise of which likely depends on whether the presence of mismatching content is merely unpersuasive versus counter-persuasive (Luttrell & Trentadue, 2024). For example, trying to combine liberal and conservative appeals in the same message could diminish the message's effectiveness when political partisans see the content targeting the other side. In contrast, combining affective and cognitive elements in the same appeal might not have this issue as people might not view arguments employing their non-dominant attitude basis as a reason to reject the appeal. Nonetheless a message with two cognitive and two emotional arguments might not be as effective for an emotionally oriented person as a message with four emotional arguments. So, further research is needed on this as it has important theoretical insights as well as practical ramifications for messaging practitioners across domains.

Conclusion

Within this volume, we provided comprehensive chapters on some of the most commonly studied variables in personalized persuasion as well as the popular domains for which it has had broad impact. Across both sections of this volume, we presented some of the latest findings and thinking with respect to personalized persuasion, outlining its effectiveness, mechanisms, and applications. Of course, there is still much work to be done on the theorizing and implementation of this persuasive approach, and given its already documented widespread impact, the value in better understanding its influence cannot be overstated. To this point, we urge any readers of this book or scholars and practitioners of personalized persuasion to use the knowledge within this volume to the benefit of society. That is, just as personalized persuasion can be used prosocially (e.g., to enhance healthy behaviors), so, too, can it be used more nefariously (e.g., to spread disinformation), especially when

leveraged on a widespread scale. Moreover, with the rise of generative artificial intelligence, the robust influence of personalized persuasion may have reached an inflection point, one, we hope, that moves us more quickly to enriching people's everyday, personal experiences.

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