

A walk in customers' shoes: How Attention Bias Modification Treatment affects ownership of integrity-violating social media posts

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Abstract

Objectives

The number of social media posts that expose company integrity violations has increased dramatically. In response, some companies allow employees to engage in direct dialogue with bloggers, which requires employees to take the customer's perspective before responding.

Methods

Attention Bias Modification Treatment primes branch managers of a global *Fortune* 100 banking group with a self-sufficient, cognitive, or empathic attention bias.

Results and conclusions

The results indicate that narrative transportation, or the extent to which employees mentally enter the world evoked by a customer's story, mediates the effect of attention bias on two relevant psychological ownership dimensions: acknowledgment of responsibility and willingness to respond. Participants with a self-sufficient bias neither acknowledge responsibility nor want to respond. However, participants primed with an empathic bias take responsibility for the customer's case and respond to the integrity violation. The effect strengthens when the employee perceives the customer's financial vulnerability as high.

Conclusions

Through transportation, attention bias affects employees' inclination to assume ownership of an integrity violation.

Keywords: Attention Bias Modification Treatment, Empathy, Psychological ownership, Social media, Transportation

Introduction

As social media proliferate, such that markets get defined as conversations (Searls & Weinberger, 2009), the impact of public opinion changes. Whereas once customer voices may have fallen on deaf ears, today people can easily share their disappointing consumption experience with a receptive, massive audience by communicating through the rapidly growing medium of weblogs (blogs) (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2010). Millions of incensed bloggers thus accused Citigroup of distorting investment research reports to manipulate consumer investment decisions. Even more than competence failures or product recalls, online accounts of unethical employee behavior erode consumer trust and dramatically influence the way they process and share information (Gartner Research, 2007; *The Economist*, 2006; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). Yet stories of unfair practices remain largely beyond the control of companies (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009). In the context of social media, statements from official spokespeople appear to be “cheap talk” (Farrell & Rabin, 1996), whereas consumers might relate more with workers in the lower ranks (Gaines-Ross, 2010). Therefore, an increasing number of organizations, including Best Buy, British Telecom, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, SAP, TNT, Zappos, and even the U.S. Army, now encourage employees to respond personally to social media messages. In so doing, they must ensure that employees respond appropriately by putting themselves in the customer’s shoes before issuing their responses to concerns voiced on blogs. A recent marketing decision maker survey (SAS, 2009) thus identifies a demand for mental triggers that can drive employees to adopt a mindset in which they assume ownership of events that prompt customer complaints in blogs and thereby offer a response that is more likely to restore customer trust.

Recent advances in narrative transportation research may address this demand. Transportation refers to a reader’s “integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings, focused on story events” (Green, 2004, p. 248). Mounting empirical evidence indicates that

being engrossed in a narrative account of someone else's experience facilitates other-regarding beliefs and intentions (Escalas & Stern, 2003; Polichak & Gerrig, 2002). Thus far though, examinations of the persuasive influence of transportation focus primarily on entertainment and advertising (e.g., Escalas, 2007; Green & Brock, 2002; Slater, 2002b). We instead propose that reading customer accounts of integrity violations on blogs might cause employees to be transported into the customers' perspective, causing them to feel a sense of ownership or obligation to deal with the problem at hand.

However, when employees confront reported violations of integrity, they instinctively tend to exhibit external, rather than self, attributions (Folkes, 1988; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986). In addition, the influence of transportation is subject to considerable variation across readers, depending on their ability to empathize with others for example (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004). Transportation also varies according to the relationship between prior knowledge about the personal circumstances of the protagonist and the severity of the events described (Green, 2004). We therefore take such variations into account when determining how companies might use narrative transportation as a vehicle for implementing an organization-wide sense of responsibility to take action in response to customer blogs.

Rather than relying solely on employees' general disposition to take a customer perspective and assume ownership of the task of restoring integrity, it may be more effective to induce a biased mindset that triggers transportation and key ownership dimensions, namely, acknowledgement of responsibility and intention to respond. Pennebaker, Mehl, and Niederhoffer (2003) show that others' perspectives can be induced momentarily and promote a desirable response, though the ability to put on another person's "mental shoes" is a sophisticated process that requires empathy. To develop an in-depth understanding, we explore the potential of priming empathy as a driver of narrative transportation, in relation to

employees' ownership of integrity violations. This exploration reflects two main research objectives.

First, we posit that perspective taking can prime transportation, but we also need to attend to both cognitive and affective elements. Perspective taking is clearly a cognitive mindset that drives other-regarding behavior (cf., Smeesters, Wheeler, & Kay, 2009), but it also might be affect based (Lamm, Batson, & Decety, 2007). Customer accounts of integrity violations on blog posts offer affect-laden experiential stories, in which the customer is the protagonist (Delgadillo & Escalas, 2004; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). Reading a story from the protagonist's point of view enhances the probability that readers share this character's worldview. Yet for transportation to provoke a sense of responsibility and a willingness to respond, we posit that it is not sufficient to take another's perspective; the employee must also be mindful of the other's affective condition (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2002). Thus, triggering an *empathic* perspective may address both affective and cognitive elements of integrity violations. We extend current research by advancing Attention Bias Modification Treatment (ABMT) to enhance the effectiveness with which transportation encourages employees' ownership. Thus we empirically assess whether empathic ABMT leads to a higher sense of responsibility and willingness to respond, prior to formulating an actual response to a blog post.

Second, we examine an important boundary condition of empathic ABMT. According to Dunlop, Wakefield, and Kashima (2008), empathy gets experienced predominantly when people recognize or perceive a particular relationship between the narrator and the narrative events. Relevant prior knowledge about the narrator's personal circumstances makes it easier to find this connection. In the case of integrity violations reported in blog posts, a customer's vulnerability to the integrity violation may provide such relevant information. That is, empathy should be triggered when the employee relates the customer's vulnerability to the

integrity violation, such that ABMT could be strengthened or weakened by customer vulnerability. In a field experiment with employees of a large financial institution, we assess whether this line of reasoning fits with regard to the impact of financial vulnerability on transportation.

Conceptual Background

Ownership of Integrity Violations

We develop our conceptual background by elaborating first on the need to assume psychological ownership of an integrity violation to repair a relationship. An emerging theme, integrity violation refers to the situation that occurs when one party perceives that another party is no longer adhering to acceptable or necessary principles and standards in the relationship (Ferrin, Kim, Cooper, & Dirks, 2007; Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004; Mayer & Davis, 1999). For employees to restore customers from their perceptions of such violations, they must assume ownership of the integrity-destroying events described in the customers' blog posts. Ownership of integrity violations appears to involve a four-dimensional structure: (1) recognizing that the events destroy integrity, (2) determining the cause of the reduced integrity, (3) acknowledging where the responsibility for the consequences rests, and (4) being willing to respond to the integrity violation (Itoi, Ohbuchi, & Fukuno, 1996; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996).

First, recognizing the destructive effects of events described in a blog post follows directly from Lewicki and Bunker (1996); it seems relatively self-evident. Members of online communities subject to integrity violations sense a need for full disclosure about the events, as well as their consequences (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007). If the events had not been destructive of integrity or the relationship, it seems difficult even to account for the posts.

Second, the cause of the violation must be identified. Previous research on integrity violations often manipulates the level of ownership by varying this dimension (Folkes & Kotsos, 1986; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). For example, Oliver and DeSarbo (1988) vary whether an employee did or did not pick a failed stock. True causality may be debatable though (e.g., a behavior relates only remotely to events, the events were accidents or unintended). Even if customers feel that employee behavior has caused the violation of their integrity, employees still could view their behavior as relatively trivial.

Third, acknowledging responsibility for consequences is a key element of ownership. Lewicki and Bunker (1996, p. 132) argue that “taking responsibility is a key step in trust repair.” It also contributes to any apologies (Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989). Even if employees believe that they did not cause the events, they can influence customer relationships by acknowledging responsibility for their consequences. For example, one Best Buy customer service representative responded to a disappointed customer blogging about a broken iPhone by arranging for a replacement iPhone, even though the customer’s insurance plan did not cover this replacement specifically (Bernoff & Schadler, 2010). In contrast, denying all responsibility implies that the employee considers the events unimportant or insignificant for integrity perceptions or believes there were no consequences (Kim, et al., 2004). Yet in an online context, if integrity has been violated in the eye of the beholder, it has been violated (Brown & Morgan, 2006). Disagreement only intensifies customers’ negative opinions (Das & Chen, 2007), and denial contributes to further integrity deterioration rather than repair (van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010).

Fourth, ownership studies stress the importance of willingness to respond (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Payne & Webber, 2006; Vandenberghe, et al., 2007). Employees must be willing to invest time and energy in the relationship (Maslyn

& Uhl-Bien, 2001) and perceive that its long-term benefits are “worth” their engagement, such that their involvement and enthusiasm can lead to more customer satisfaction (Harter, et al., 2002). If employees recognize the fundamental and critical importance of strong customer relationships, they should be willing to work hard to rebuild a sense of integrity that has been violated (Payne & Webber, 2006). Even in employee–customer encounters in which employees do not expect the relationship to continue, responsive employees should be motivated to repair an integrity violation (Vandenberghe, et al., 2007). In addition, firms generally cannot opt out of relationships online; if their relationships with bloggers sour, companies must endure the high costs of customer exits (van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010).

In summary, the acknowledgment of responsibility and willingness to respond are both important for social media settings, because customer comments and corporate responses are subject to great visibility. In the particular case of blog posts, these efforts by employees may be visible to a very large audience (Brealy, 2010). Instilling a sense of responsibility among employees and enhancing their willingness to respond is thus clearly relevant.

Transportation

Blog posts allow employees to become closely engaged in the customer’s story, so we pursue an in-depth understanding of transportation, the function that underlies this effect. Slater (2002a, p. 171) notes that readers of a narrative “typically appear to be far more engrossed in the message than are readers or viewers of news stories, speeches, ads, or social science book chapters.” When a reader becomes engrossed in the narrative world, he or she leaves the immediate surroundings momentarily behind. This conceptualization distinguishes transportation from similar phenomena that involve feelings of presence in mediated environments, unrelated to narratives (e.g., telepresence, Steuer, 1992), or general tendencies to be immersed into life experiences without persuasive effects (e.g., optimal experience or “flow”, Csikszentmihalyi, 1992; absorption, Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974). Being transported

influences the processing of various narratives, ranging from branded advertisements (Escalas, 2004; Wang & Calder, 2009) to social media messages (van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010), with important consequences for belief and intentions. As Slater and Rouner (2002, p. 180) establish, transportation prevents readers from generating counterarguments “even if the persuasive subtext is inconsistent with prior attitudes, beliefs, or values,” such that they are more likely to accept the beliefs and intentions implied by a narrative.

Attention Bias

While reading customer blogs, people might adopt three differential attention biases. Self-sufficiency suggests an attention bias based on individualism and self-reliance, which generally leads to a lack of responsibility and fear of commitment (Frank, Gilovich, & Regan, 1993; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007; Tang, et al., 2008; Zhou, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2009). People with a self-sufficient attention bias prefer that others do not depend on them and behave accordingly. When primed with self-sufficiency, people also are less communally motivated (Tang, et al., 2008), stay separate from others (Zhou, et al., 2009), perform socially insensitive acts (Small, et al., 2007), and make self-interested moves when faced with social dilemmas (Frank, et al., 1993).

In contrast, modifying the attention bias to another, such as a customer, drives other-regarding beliefs and intentions. In this mindset, people use communal norms and view the world through the cognitive lens of others (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Aggarwal & Zhang, 2006). Smeesters, Wheeler, and Kay (2009) show that such an attention bias can instigate behavior that supports a significant relationship. Cognitively shifting employee attention biases to the customer’s view may help them acknowledge responsibility for the experiences that customers share and respond effectively to the integrity violation.

Yet blog posters also tend to be amateur authors who are personally involved (Kozinets, et al., 2010). In this case, a purely cognitive attention bias is unlikely to capture the

affective nature of a blogging customer's experience. Zillmann and Bryant (1994) identify empathy as a key positive affective disposition, and recent research (e.g., Nabi & Krmar, 2004; Raney, 2004; Zillmann & Bryant, 1994) suggests that people who read personal narratives and use empathy as a significant cue display altruistic, unselfish behaviors. Furthermore, Mikulincer and colleagues (2001) demonstrate that with their empathic reaction to others, people take sides emotionally. Because empathy promotes a cognitive sense of common fate with the other party and affective togetherness, it likely enhances other-regarding attention biases in response to personal narratives. The potential impact of empathy thus demands an extension of transportation theory. An empathic attention bias regards the customer as a social being and implies greater concern about the customer's thoughts and emotions. Empathic employees thus should be socially sensitive and want to work to restore the integrity of the customer.

In brief, we posit that an empathic attention bias encourages transportation and its outcomes more than a self-sufficient attention bias does. To determine the nature of this distinction, we undertake a conceptual investigation into empathy's robustness. That is, empathy predominantly emerges when people recognize or perceive a particular relationship between the narrator and the narrative events (Dunlop, et al., 2008). In the case of integrity violations, empathy gets triggered by the recognition of the customer's vulnerability to the violation. Accordingly, we predict that empathy is triggered most often when the employee recognizes that the customer is vulnerable to financial loss due to the integrity violation. In this context, vulnerability refers to the employee's belief that the customer is suffering from the integrity violation and that the financial consequences are severe (Mayer & Davis, 1999). Information about high vulnerability should evoke stronger empathic reactions. As De Wit, Das, and Vet (2008) propose, the presence of such information during the experience of affect also can influence transportation, independent of cognitive appraisals. In contrast, low

vulnerability exhibits an inverse relationship with empathy (Greenwood, 2007). We therefore concentrate on the transient recognition of customer vulnerability and the way it moderates the effect of an empathic attention bias.

Hypotheses Development

Before the rise of social media, toll-free numbers and call center agents were the primary responders to customer complaints about integrity violations. Expressions of dissatisfaction through such media involve dyadic interactions, whereas blog posts usually are vented widely and publicly online. Because blog posts also are narratives, in which characters experience causally connected events, customers are the protagonists of their own stories (Adaval & Wyer Jr., 1998), and empathy for these characters may drive transportation (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). Simultaneously, readers likely experience inhibition of negative cognitive responses, such that they are not inclined to argue against narrative-based beliefs and intentions. After they have been transported, people generally exhibit positive responses (Polichak & Gerrig, 2002) and often change their view to support the protagonist (Slater, 2002b). We extend these ideas to determine if transportation also underlies a sense of responsibility and an intention to respond to blog complaints. People who read a blog post and adopt the attention bias of the thoughts and emotions of the story characters should be more transported into the consumption experience than people who are only cognitively affected. The greater transportation then strengthens willingness to take responsibility and respond.

We also posit that an empathic attention bias drives these outcomes, through transportation. Empathy here is not a stable trait or service outcome but rather a mental driver or transitory mindset. Using mental triggers that momentarily improve a person's attention bias should influence psychological ownership as well. It may be possible to influence employees' acknowledgment of responsibility just by varying their attention bias (constant blog posts, *ceteris paribus*). Because descriptions of integrity violations in blogs usually are

personal, an activated empathic attention bias may make employees feel relatively more responsible for the events, compared with their response from a purely cognitive attention bias. An empathic attention bias also should imply that employees temporarily share the thoughts and emotions of customers and get transported into the narrative, which could have desirable impacts on their willingness to respond. An activated attention bias of the self instead should mean that self-sufficient employees are less transported into the blog post, compared with employees with empathic or cognitive attention biases; they also should be less likely to feel responsible or respond to the integrity violation. We hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: An empathic attention bias leads to greater (a) acknowledgment of responsibility and (b) willingness to respond than a cognitive or self-sufficient attention bias.

Hypothesis 2: Transportation mediates the effect of an empathic attention bias on (a) acknowledgment of responsibility and (b) willingness to respond.

Knowing the customer's financial vulnerability also might differentially influence the likelihood of employee transportation. Following Dunlop, Wakefield, and Kashima (2008), we predict that empathy is mainly triggered by employees' recognition of the customer's financial vulnerability to the integrity violation, perhaps based on the customer risk profile. Arguably, higher customer vulnerability should lead to more employee transportation, because employees should understand the violation accusations in the blog posts. These employees may be able to draw on this recognition of vulnerability to empathize more with the characters (i.e., blogging customers) and be transported more deeply into the blog post. In contrast, employees who encounter a customer who is relatively less financially vulnerable may sense greater distance from the customer's violation accusation, because of the greater effort they must exert to create an empathic attention bias. Prior knowledge about customer

financial vulnerability thus should interact with an empathic attention bias to influence transportation, and we hypothesize

Hypothesis 3: As a customer's financial vulnerability decreases, employee responsiveness to empathy decreases, which decreases the effect of an empathic attention bias on transportation.

We test these three hypotheses with an extensive pretest and field study.

Empirical Study

Pretest

To test our hypotheses, we constructed Attention Bias Modification Treatments for empathy and self-sufficiency. In a pretest, we examined whether they appropriately modified these mental models. To rule out the possibility that either technique failed to modify the desired concept, we also included a neutral condition. The focal blog post contained a customer accusation of an integrity violation, and the pretest also determined whether the blog post met four necessary criteria to produce transportation and ownership effects. First, following Green and Brock (2002), we checked whether participants perceived the blog post as a narrative. Second, for them to assess ownership, participants should be able to recognize the nature of the violation. Third, the blog post revealed the cause for the integrity violation, such that it could be attributed to both employees and customers. Fourth, the blog post needed to feature unfavorable consequences for the customer, for which an employee plausibly could acknowledge some responsibility.

In the ABMT, participants solved a puzzle in which they had to find words that activated empathy, self-sufficiency, or neither. Therefore, the pretest used an empathy versus self-sufficiency versus neutral ABMT between-subjects design. The participants were randomly assigned to ABMT conditions, then asked to read an online blog post in which a

customer described an integrity failure during a financial service encounter. Finally, we assessed whether the ABMT was effective and the blog post met the criteria.

Participants. From a medium-sized Dutch university, a sample of 105 business graduate students participated; they should have a reasonable understanding of a financial services context. The participants were 23 years of age on average (18–29 years), and 55.2% were women.

Attention Bias Modification Treatment (ABMT) and material. To prime the participants, we used three computer-generated word search puzzles that each participant completed at the beginning of the experimental session. Solving a puzzle offers a valid technique for priming participants to think deeply about a particular concept—ranging from achievement to affiliation (Bargh, 1997; Bargh & Barndollar, 1996; Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001)—without direct instructions. The puzzles were 15 letters long and 15 letters wide, and words could be spelled horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. Below each puzzle, we provided a list of 12 words embedded in the matrix, and in all cases, the same set of 6 neutral words appeared in this list (book, bottom, building, green, jump, and metal). In the empathy ABMT condition, the other 6 words were those used by Mikulincer and colleagues (2001)—compassion, moved, softhearted, sympathy, tender, and warm (Figure 1)—to connote empathy for others.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The self-sufficiency words came from Vohs, Mead, and Goode (2006): capital, check, profits, raise, revenues, and wealthy (Figure 2). They should activate self-sufficiency.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

In the neutral condition, the 6 remaining words had no specific connotation (i.e., going, is, printer, purple, top, and win; see Figure 3). The neutral words also came from Vohs, Mead, and Goode (2006).

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

In the selected blog post, a customer “Paul” told the story of losing his retirement savings by being sold an investment fund that evaporated (see the Appendix).¹ We set the scene in a financial service context for three reasons. First, it is hard for customers to judge the quality of financial products, which are complex and difficult to understand, so they often rely on trusted financial advisers. Second, both the company and a wider community realistically might be alerted simultaneously through blogs after an integrity violation. Third, Green, Brock, and Kaufman (2004) claim that a topic’s popularity may signal its capacity to transport readers, and financial services involve four of the nine absolute interests: chaos, destruction, money, and power (for the complete list, see Schank, 1979).

Measures. To assess the degree of empathy that the word search puzzles primed, we adapted Davis’s (1983) empathic ability items to make them appropriate to our blog post context, such as “While I was reading the blog post, I imagined how I would feel if the events in the story were happening to me” and “I did not get extremely involved in the blog post” (reversed).

To check the narrative format, we asked participants to respond to an instrument provided by Woodside, Sood, and Miller (2008) about the blog post’s storytelling features, using ten semantic scales (e.g., “detriments/clear-cut situations,” “argument logic/personal evolution or change”; $\alpha = .85$).

Regarding whether the participants identified the nature of the violation, we asked them what the accusation brought into question: “primarily the financial adviser’s competence (e.g., knowledge of finance),” “primarily the financial adviser’s integrity (e.g., willingness to bend the rules),” or “neither of the above.”

We relied on standard measures of causal attribution of blame and acknowledgment of responsibility (Fenigstein & Levine, 1984; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986; Pham, Goukens,

¹ The complete scenarios are available on request.

Lehmann, & Stuart, 2010). That is, we assessed causal attribution of blame by asking participants to divide 100 points across the customer and the financial adviser. They completed a similar task for acknowledgment of responsibility, in which they assessed the extent to which they thought the financial adviser should take responsibility for the consequences of selling the investment fund to the customer (up to 100%).

We also tested whether participants were equally susceptible to empathy and self-sufficiency. The different participant groups would need to be homogeneous in this respect for us to compare ABMT effects. Therefore, we used Tang and colleagues' (2008) love of money scale to measure individual aspirations for and attitudes toward money and Reynolds's (2008) moral attentiveness scale to measure their tendency to overrepresent or exaggerate moral experiences.

Pretest Results

Material checks. Responses to the material checks revealed that the blog post met all four criteria. To check the narrative format criterion, we examined whether the participants correctly identified the narrative blog post format. They rated it significantly above the neutral midpoint of the aggregated scale ($t_{(104)} = 16.94, p < .001$), which indicated that they perceived the format as significantly narrative ($M = 5.48, SD = .90$), across all ABMT conditions ($F_{(2, 102)} = 1.91, p = .153$). For the identification of the violation, almost all participants (102 of 105) reported that they thought that the financial adviser's integrity came into question. The remaining responses did not show a correlational pattern across ABMT conditions ($\chi^2_{(4)} = 3.68, p = .452$).² We also assessed whether the participants could attribute blame to the financial adviser or the customer; blame was convincingly attributed to neither ($M = 51.43, SD = 35.58$, ranging from 0 to 100). Thus, participants across all ABMT conditions were equally ambiguous in attributing blame ($F_{(2, 102)} = 2.06, p = .133$). Finally, we concluded that

² We conducted separate analyses for the 102 participants. The results showed a pattern similar to that for the 105 participants reported here.

the acknowledgment of responsibility criterion was met. The ABMT should have influenced this perception, so we performed a paired-samples *t*-test to compare attributions of blame against the acknowledgment of responsibility in the neutral condition. The test revealed that participants' acknowledgment of responsibility was significantly greater than their attribution of blame (mean difference = 19.41, SE = 4.53; $t_{(33)} = 4.29, p < .001$).

Attention Bias Modification Treatment (ABMT) checks. Table 1 contains the dependent and control variables' average scores, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

We first verified if participants across all conditions were equally susceptible to empathy and self-sufficiency. We conducted regression analyses with age, love of money, and moral attentiveness as predictors and performed a *t*-test of gender on perceived empathy. The relationships were not significant ($t < 2.00, p > .05$), so heterogeneity was not an issue.

Our successful ABMT also was reflected in the effect on measured empathy ($F_{(2, 102)} = 17.70, p < .001; \eta^2 = .258$). An analysis of variance revealed that the empathy word search puzzle primed empathy to a greater degree than the neutral (mean difference = .84, SE = .22, $p < .001$) or self-sufficiency (mean difference = 1.30, SE = .22, $p < .001$) puzzles. Neutral priming also resulted in higher empathy levels than did self-sufficiency ABMT (mean difference = .46, SE = .23, $p < .05$).

To provide a preliminary test of Hypothesis 1a, we conducted another analysis of variance ($F_{(2, 102)} = 15.49, p < .001; \eta^2 = .233$). Comparing participants primed with empathy against those in the other ABMT conditions, we found that the empathy-primed participants ascribed more responsibility to the financial adviser than did participants in the neutral (mean difference = 24.23, SE = 7.53, $p < .01$) or self-sufficiency (mean difference = 41.34, SE = 7.47, $p < .001$) conditions. The difference between the neutral and self-sufficiency conditions

also was positively significant (mean difference = 17.11, SE = 7.58, $p < .05$). However, considering the sample and lack of a cognitive group, the pretest did not provide an adequate test of Hypothesis 1a.

Study Method

We designed the main study to examine the effect of an empathic versus a cognitive or self-sufficient employee attention bias across differing levels of the customer's financial vulnerability. The experiment was conducted in an employee training context, such that we introduced it as an exercise for assessing customer vulnerability. Before reading a customer profile, participants received a word search puzzle, reportedly to help them relax while the training session was being prepared. Unbeknownst to participants, we primed their empathy or self-sufficiency with these puzzles, similar to the procedure in the pretest. To confirm the ABMT had a sufficient impact on participants' attention bias, we retained a cognitive attention bias group that did not complete a prime. The participants then read a customer risk profile, which indicated prior knowledge about that customer's financial vulnerability, whether high, moderate, or low. Next, participants chose an investment fund to offer to the customer but then discovered the customer had gotten into severe financial trouble after accepting the offer, as recounted in a blog post supposedly written by this customer. All participants were instructed to respond to the blog post according to standard procedures for customer feedback. This instruction stimulated participants to take the customer's attention bias. After reading the blog post, participants completed a questionnaire. Thus, our study used a 3 (attention bias: empathic, cognitive, or self-sufficient) \times 3 (customer vulnerability: high, moderate, or low) factorial design, with participants randomly assigned to the different groups. After all participants finished the study, we informed them of the goal of the experiment and answered any questions.

Participants. Branch managers from a global *Fortune* 100 banking group ($n = 350$) participated in this study; they represent an initial level of contact who have the authority to repair customer trust (according to a 2009 internal document from the banking group). These professional experts averaged 44 years of age (from 25–60 years), had 20 years of business experience, and were primarily of Belgian nationality (98.3%).³ A small minority (1.2%) had received no diploma, 25.2% earned a high school diploma, 47.4% received a college degree, and 26.2% graduated from university. The sample consisted mostly of men (75.9%), reflective of the 70% male workforce. The sample represented 246 bank branches.

Attention Bias Modification Treatment (ABMT), material, and manipulation. As we noted previously, we used the empathy and self-sufficiency ABMT from the pretest (see Figures 1 and 2). The cognitive group did not get a puzzle. After the experiment, we asked participants to respond to a question about the purpose of the word search puzzle. Their responses revealed that the intent was successfully hidden; none of the participants correctly guessed the puzzle's purpose. Following the ABMT, the participants read the following excerpt:

Paul has accepted your offer. Please read the following blog post by Paul. While reading this blog post, apply standard procedures for dealing with customer feedback. Think about what happened. Place yourself in Paul's shoes.

This instruction thus stimulated cognitive attention bias modification, in line with Green and Brock (2000). The pretested blog post also brought the employee's integrity into question (see the Appendix).

To manipulate customer financial vulnerability, we applied the MiFID ("Markets in Financial Instruments Directive," 2009); this European Commission directive prescribes, among other things, that when an employee of a financial institution gives advice, he or she

³ Because the banking group's working languages included both Dutch and French, we carried out International Test Commission translation and back-translation procedures on all materials and instruments (Hambleton, 2001; Hambleton, Yu, & Slater, 1999; Mullen, 1995).

must consider the customer's profile, including financial situation, investment aims, and investment knowledge and experience. The MiFID also obliges financial institutions to classify all customers according to their financial vulnerability.⁴ Therefore, we used three customer profiles to describe them, as follows:

“High”: Paul has some money in a savings account, and he buys mainly savings certificates. Paul only wants investments that yield a guaranteed or predictable return. He thinks investing in stocks and shares is in fact “gambling.” Thus, things like shares are lost on him.

“Moderate”: One-quarter of Paul's professional income goes into paying off his house and his car. Furthermore, he puts money in the bank, and he contributes to a pension fund. Safe, fixed-interest savings certificates and funds make up the principal part of his investment portfolio. On occasion, he dares to buy an equity fund with money he does not need right away.

“Low”: Paul devotes his investment strategy completely to “opportunities.” Shares make up three-quarters of his investment portfolio. Paul knows that shares can turn out badly sometimes, but that does not put him off. On the contrary, he interprets a drop in prices as an opportunity to buy more. In his bond portfolio, he wants to have it all.

Measures. Except for a slight adaptation to the particular context, the acknowledgment of responsibility measure was identical to that used in the pretest. The willingness to respond scale consisted of three Likert-type statements that measured participants' desire to continue a relationship with a customer, as well as their willingness to sustain the relationship over time. The scale came from De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, and Iacobucci (2001). Because the composite reliability was inadequate for the complete scale ($\alpha = .66$), we dropped the item

⁴ High, moderate, and low vulnerability are feigned designations. The names presented represented stock market-sensitive information.

“Even if Paul would be more difficult to retain, I would still keep trying.” The reliability for the remaining two items (“I am willing ‘to go the extra mile’ to retain Paul as a customer” and “I feel loyal toward Paul”) was acceptable ($\alpha = .76, \rho = .61, p < .001$).

Because one of our primary aims was to test whether transportation could predict narrative-based responsibility acknowledgment (H2a) and willingness to respond (H2b), participants also completed the transportation questionnaire developed by Green and Brock (2000). They responded to the 12 items on Likert-type scales ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” such as, “I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative” and “After finishing the narrative, I found it easy to put it out of my mind” (reversed).

As in the pretest, we assessed participants’ homogeneity. However, the priming words could be interacting with branch managers’ customer-oriented abilities, so the homogeneity measures we used in the pretest were insufficient for our purposes here. In addition to the love of money (Tang, et al., 2008) and moral attentiveness (Reynolds, 2008) measures, we therefore compared participants according to the different conditions in Saxe and Weitz’s (1982) selling orientation–customer orientation scale (as shortened by Periatt, LeMay, & Chakrabarty, 2004), which provides a measure of the general tendency to meet customer needs. Items in this scale included “I try to figure out what customer needs are” (customer orientation) and “It is necessary to stretch the truth in describing a product to a customer” (selling orientation).

Study Results

Manipulation checks. Participants answered two manipulation check questions to confirm the customer vulnerability manipulation (high, moderate, or low). The first question pertained to the estimated risk associated with the investment fund they might offer. After reading a customer profile, participants chose one of their banking group’s investment funds

and indicated the risk they believed it represented, according to the official European Union (EU) risk classification, which ranged from 0 (no risk) to 5 (high risk). The second question checked whether the participants recognized the customer profile: “You have just read Paul’s customer profile. What level of financial vulnerability does Paul have?” The possible answers were high, moderate, or low.

Responses to the two checks revealed that the manipulation was successful. Participants’ risk estimations differed significantly among the high ($M = 1.53$, $SD = 1.27$), moderate ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 1.60$), and low ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.22$, $F_{(2, 347)} = 104.61$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .366$; simple contrasts: $SE = .17$, $p < .001$) customer vulnerability conditions. Of 350 participants, 343 answered the customer profile question correctly ($\chi^2_{(6)} = 966.03$, $p < .001$, $\phi = 1.63$). We excluded 7 participants who wrongly answered the customer profile question, because they likely read the profile partially or carelessly.

Another question, adapted from Green and Brock (2000), determined participants’ task understanding while they read the blog post. They answered two Likert-type items, anchored by “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” regarding whether they “become Paul” and “think about what happened” ($\rho = .79$, $p < .001$). The average was significantly above the neutral midpoint of the aggregated scale ($t_{(349)} = 210.73$, $p < .001$) and did not differ across ABMT conditions ($F_{(2, 347)} = 1.05$, $p = .351$). That is, all participants tried to take Paul’s attention bias on the narrative events ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .18$), and the task was well understood.

Table 2 contains the average scores, reliabilities, and intercorrelations of the dependent and control measures.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

We also verified whether the collected demographics and homogeneity measures influenced our dependent measures. In three multiple regression analyses, we took age, business experience, bank branch, love of money, moral attentiveness, customer orientation, and

selling orientation into consideration as potential predictor variables for acknowledgment of responsibility, willingness to respond, and transportation. The models were significant for acknowledgment of responsibility ($F_{(7, 335)} = 2.86, p < .01, R^2 = .056$) and transportation ($F_{(7, 335)} = 3.82, p < .01, R^2 = .074$). Age had a positive effect on acknowledgment of responsibility ($\beta = .24, t_{(1)} = 2.12, p < .05$), whereas selling orientation had a negative effect ($\beta = -.13, t_{(1)} = -2.22, p < .05$). Furthermore, age ($\beta = .23, t_{(1)} = 2.06, p < .05$) and moral attentiveness ($\beta = .18, t_{(1)} = 3.43, p < .01$) both had positive effects on transportation. Analyses of variance comparing nationalities, working languages, levels of education, and genders with regard to their effects on acknowledgment of responsibility, willingness to respond, and transportation revealed that gender significantly influenced acknowledgment of responsibility ($F_{(1, 331)} = 4.25, p < .05, \eta^2 = .013$), in that women ($M = 48.07, SD = 20.51$) acknowledged significantly more responsibility than men ($M = 42.22, SD = 26.11$). The remaining relationships were not significant (regression analyses: $t < 1.90, p > .06$; analyses of variance: $F < 1.80, p > .10$). Age, selling orientation, moral attentiveness, and gender therefore served as covariates in our subsequent analyses.

Hypotheses tests. Table 3 contains the average scores and standard deviations for acknowledgment of responsibility, willingness to respond, and transportation across empathic, cognitive, and self-sufficient attention biases, as well as customer vulnerability conditions.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

To test Hypothesis 1a, we conducted an analysis of covariance to examine responsibility acknowledgment across the attention bias conditions. The analysis indicated a significant attention bias effect ($F_{(2, 330)} = 5.88, p < .01, \eta^2 = .034$). According to simple contrast tests, acknowledgment of responsibility was higher with an empathic than with a cognitive (mean difference = 6.03, SE = 2.57, $p < .05$) or self-sufficient (mean difference =

8.50, $SE = 2.54$, $p < .01$) attention bias. There was no significant difference between cognitive and self-sufficient attention biases (mean difference = 2.47, $SE = 2.52$, $p = .327$).

We also hypothesized that willingness to respond would differ across these attention biases (H1b). The relevant analysis of covariance revealed a significant difference among attention biases ($F_{(2, 330)} = 7.00$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .041$). Willingness to respond was higher for empathic than for cognitive (mean difference = .44, $SE = .17$, $p < .05$) and self-sufficient (mean difference = .62, $SE = .17$, $p < .001$) attention biases. Willingness to respond was also significantly different between the cognitive and self-sufficient attention biases (mean difference = .18, $SE = .17$, $p = .280$). In summary, the results support Hypothesis 1b.

Transportation was the primary dependent variable for the tests of Hypotheses 2 and 3. A 3×3 analysis of covariance showed significant differences among attention biases ($F_{(2, 330)} = 15.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .087$) and customer vulnerability conditions ($F_{(2, 330)} = 12.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .069$). According to the simple contrasts, participants primed to empathize with the customer experienced more transportation than those who took a cognitive (mean difference = .29, $SE = .11$, $p < .05$) or self-sufficient (mean difference = .62, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$) attention bias. Participants with a cognitive attention bias also were more transported than those with a self-sufficient attention bias (mean difference = .33, $SE = .11$, $p < .01$). To test whether transportation explains the effect of empathic attention bias on acknowledgment of responsibility and willingness to respond, we conducted mediation analyses (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). The Sobel tests support Hypothesis 2a ($Z = 4.19$, $p < .001$) and Hypothesis 2b ($Z = 2.74$, $p < .01$).

Our successful ABMT and manipulation also were reflected in the interaction effect on transportation ($F_{(4, 330)} = 3.10$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .036$), as we detail in Table 4.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Simple contrast tests revealed that high customer vulnerability led to more transportation than moderate or low vulnerability with an empathic attention bias compared with a self-sufficient attention bias, in support of Hypothesis 3. However, customer vulnerability levels did not result in different transportation when participants took a cognitive attention bias (see Figure 4).

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

Discussion

In the context of integrity violations, the rise of social media grants customers a great opportunity to make their voices heard. This trend suggests that employees' handling of complaints of integrity violations online is a relevant and timely research topic. Driven by these observations, we have identified the need to develop a mental trigger that drives employees to understand and feel for customers who post blogs about integrity violations before they respond to those blog posts, with the goal of encouraging employees to take responsibility for and respond to the violation. To explain how employees attend to and process customer-generated narratives, we have used transportation theory (Green & Brock, 2002). Our results contribute to existing research in two main ways.

First, we reveal that different attention biases either encourage or discourage transportation. The effect of these different attention biases on responsibility acknowledgment and responding intentions thus is mediated by transportation. Relative to a self-sufficient attention bias, employees with an empathic or cognitive attention bias experience more transportation and feel greater moral obligation to respond to blog posts or engage in online conversations about the company. Our study also confirms that an empathic attention bias is more effective than a cognitive attention bias in creating the desired mindset, such that it prepares employees to attempt to restore integrity when they address the narratives. We thus add detail to Green and Brock's (2000) findings of a positive effect of attention bias

modification on transportation and expand scholarly understanding of the ways narratives affect beliefs and intentions.

Second, we examine the impact of a boundary condition related to attention bias modification, namely, customers' financial vulnerability. In a transporting setting, different customer vulnerability levels significantly affect Attention Bias Modification Treatment (ABMT). The knowledge that a customer is highly vulnerable to the consequences of integrity violation influences the transportation experience, such that a narrative with an example of an integrity violation becomes even more compelling if the reader adopts an empathic attention bias. This finding of an association among customer vulnerability, greater empathy, and deeper transportation by employees reinforces Dunlop, Wakefield, and Kashima's (2008) theory.

In brief, online customer narratives can have serious destructive potential, so employees must assume ownership of the issues described in these narratives. Transportation prepares employees to respond effectively to complaints of integrity violations in blog posts. Although the outcomes are conditional on customer vulnerability, employees with an empathic attention bias seem to display the highest levels of transportation into the customer experience, which enhances their sense of responsibility and willingness to respond.

Limitations and Further Research Suggestions

Although by definition field research cannot provide the same extent of control as a laboratory study, our experiment was designed and conducted meticulously. The external validity appears acceptable, yet still, the research contributions must be evaluated in light of the study limitations.

First, we base our manipulation of a self-sufficient attention bias on experiments by Vohs and colleagues (2006), who use monetary priming. In line with their interpretation, we find that if people believe they are more sufficient, they will be less engrossed in the blog post

and less likely to feel they should help others. However, Aggarwal (2004) conceptualizes a similar attention bias as “quid pro quo,” with an exchange relationship in mind. Additional research should delineate how these mindsets differ conceptually. If tested in combination with a relevant outcome (e.g., money refund), this investigation might provide an interesting empirical approach as well. Focusing on the effects on other employee beliefs and intentions may be an interesting direction for research designed to prime an empathic attention bias.

Second, our study setting may create some confounds. Beyond financial services, various markets could benefit from research on integrity and restoration efforts (e.g., retailing, Naylor, Kleiser, Baker, & Yorkston, 2008). Furthermore, the participants in the pretest should have knowledge of this context, but they may have had limited experience evaluating investment funds. This lack of experience could evoke excessive feelings of empathy for the customer and an overestimation of the financial adviser’s responsibility. Although we replicated the pretest in the main study with participants who had extensive experience with investment funds, ongoing efforts should include other markets to confirm our findings’ generalizability.

Third, we only consider blog posts, though customers share integrity violations through other social media too (e.g., status updates on Facebook, video logs on YouTube). Green and Brock (2002) argue that when narratives trigger fewer senses, recipients must exert more imaginative effort, which results in more transportation. Reading a blog post thus might provoke greater transportation than watching a video log. Yet Polichak and Gerrig (2002) also suggest that audiovisual stories generate different participatory responses than written stories, because they trigger both sight and hearing. For marketing scholars, the distinctive effects of appeals to either deep or wide senses suggest an area of interesting research possibilities related to the impact of user-generated content. Furthermore, it could be interesting to go beyond blogs and encapsulate and re-contextualize customer accounts of integrity violations

on blog posts into the wider problem of the increasing customer rage and customers' angry voices (McColl-Kennedy, Patterson, Smith, & Brady, 2009; McColl-Kennedy, Sparks, & Nguyen; Patterson, McColl-Kennedy, Smith, & Lu, 2009) and the way to manage them.

Managerial Implications

The blog context we investigate is interesting for firms that need to find ways to deal with this relatively new environment and its challenges. Managers must be cognizant of the growing popularity of online stories, particularly as avenues for customer complaints. To restore the integrity perceptions of a complaining customer, the firm cannot simply route complaints to a public relations or web care department, because such tactics exclude employees from acknowledging responsibility or responding to the customer. Moreover, a company spokesperson without any involvement in the focal transaction is unlikely to experience transportation. Therefore, instead of a scripted response provided by a customer service representative, implicated employees should transport themselves into, take responsibility for, and respond to posts about them or their actions.

In addition, many firms still rely on financial cues (e.g., exchange and interest rates, financial metrics) that have positive consequences for only some customer segments. A focus on productivity and profitability likely reinforces interest in integrity violations perceived only by customers who are less financially vulnerable. We explored whether, irrespective of “doing things right,” employees can “do the right thing” (Heide & Wathne, 2006) for customers who are more vulnerable to the consequences of integrity violations. Against this backdrop, our research shows that to evoke employee transportation, firms should create an environment that stimulates their empathic attention bias. Firms need frequent, effective triggers that can accelerate an empathic attention bias, such as screen savers or Multi-Touch Collaboration Walls that feature empathic priming words (see Figure 5). Furthermore, reward and recognition systems, which often drive performance in services industries, should balance

economic with empathic criteria to measure success. An attention bias modification index might recognize employees for demonstrations of their empathy in the previous quarter. Each action could be judged by a panel of independent experts and employees who demonstrate that they have “saved” a customer from defecting could earn rewards for their responsible, responsive behavior.

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

Finally, internal communications, such as newsletters, should prime not only a self-sufficient but also an empathic attention bias, such as by highlighting customer service and complaint handling ratings. Firms can expressly use vocabulary that elicits both attention biases; a skilled wordsmith should be hired to develop such materials. Accordingly, it seems important to review hiring practices and recruit people who are conversant with social media—such as the Comcast employee who started a Twitter account and thus put “in one deft swoop, a human face on a company that had been disparaged for poor customer service” (Gaines-Ross, 2010, p. 74). More employees might learn to respond in narrative formats and become characters in an unfolding story. Without such efforts, firms will likely produce clinical, standard responses that serve only to alienate customers and thousands of online readers. Employees always have the responsibility to treat customers well; we suggest that an empathic attention bias in online conversations may enable them even to be transported into blog posts and thus act accordingly. If employees try on the mental shoes of the customer, they may be able to walk much further into their stories.

Appendix

PaulTalk

I have nothing left.

...Each year, I saved for retirement as much as I could. So I was beside myself with joy when I met this financial magician, who just conjured up an investment portfolio out of his hat with a nice yearly return. Then the poor fellow did a disappearing act, and the high returns he promised turned out to be an illusion too. My investment portfolio has evaporated. The government pension will not be enough to live off. Will I nevertheless have to rely on it?

...They say that timing is everything—and how. My numbers lined up half a year ago, and I decided to wait to convert everything to the safety of bonds. A few months ago, my net worth was half of what it had been. Time was almost up. When I received the bad news, at first I really thought something like, I won't be able to manage all this. But later I thought something more like: Not to worry, I have ridden out dips before. But at that moment, the way things were financially, I didn't really have a choice.

...But not this time. The ride got too rough. The bank was not very considerate ... a bank that itself advised a heavy investment portfolio. If I worked at your bank, I would never advise anyone to invest such a large sum of money.

...Only time will tell, but I don't think I have enough time to recover. Scary isn't it. I have nothing now, and will have even less tomorrow. A person has to have faith in the future, but as my investment portfolio went, so did my future. I have no more faith. I am doomed.

POSTED BY PAUL

Figure 1

Empathy word search puzzle

T E I P H H C R B N L C C H U
T S M E B B E K E D E M K S A
E U O E O U H P S O X E D I M
J R V F T T I G E C U D N Y I
T X E B T A F L R C T N T G D
N U D N O T L E D E O H N F G
F I Z V M O D N Z I E Y T S X
E L E I H N K P S D N N E V X
D F A S E Q S S K M S G V A G
S O F T H E A R T E D O E P T
I R L V T P W L I P I N E O C
G S S Y M P A T H Y X D S H L
N Z R O O D R C I T L N S B H
O F C M E I M H E I E Q P A C
C S R R R C P V Z J W D D I R

book

bottom

building

compassion

green

jump

metal

moved

softhearted

sympathy

tender

warm

Figure 2

Self-sufficiency word search puzzle

Y D N S P W L V D T E E C K O
I M B U I L D I N G J W K Z R
D A R B E O M E T A L N S T Z
S G Z O E Q E T P S I E C S G
E A R O E R D M T I U S E I A
N A A K G L U I Q N H W R Q W
S H I I K J F V E C E Z E B I
E O S C E O K V G E P G Z D I
E K E A R O E A G I K K K A P
E H N P S R Q F O E K V A A G
C N T I S C S C F O H M R A A
B O T T O M R D E E I S R S T
P H G A H A X F G H C G T S K
W E A L T H Y R U T D S K L H
K A B T A E B S H E J E M O J

book

bottom

building

capital

check

green

jump

metal

profits

raise

revenues

wealthy

Figure 3

Neutral word search puzzle

D I N A H A F J B O O K M L K
L E E C A I L P U R P L E G N
D C D B A N N W I N G I T I E
I K S M K E Z O L B R R A T I
M D X H C S E I D O E J L E D
H P O S I E K R I T E F R A E
U E X W C G L L N T N O S P I
S R N A L E I I G O I N G L A
H N H B M Q R J U M P S C Y F
C S L D N P I A C O U O M E I
R B R K A G J R T X M O E D O
N L V C F F L O T Q A D P E N
R H F T A I T M R E N E N E L
Y C E E T B V D R F E F V O I
M Z H E N D I E D T F S F E N

book

bottom

building

going

green

is

jump

metal

printer

purple

top

win

Figure 4

Study: Transportation for different attention bias and customer vulnerability combinations. The error bars show the standard error.

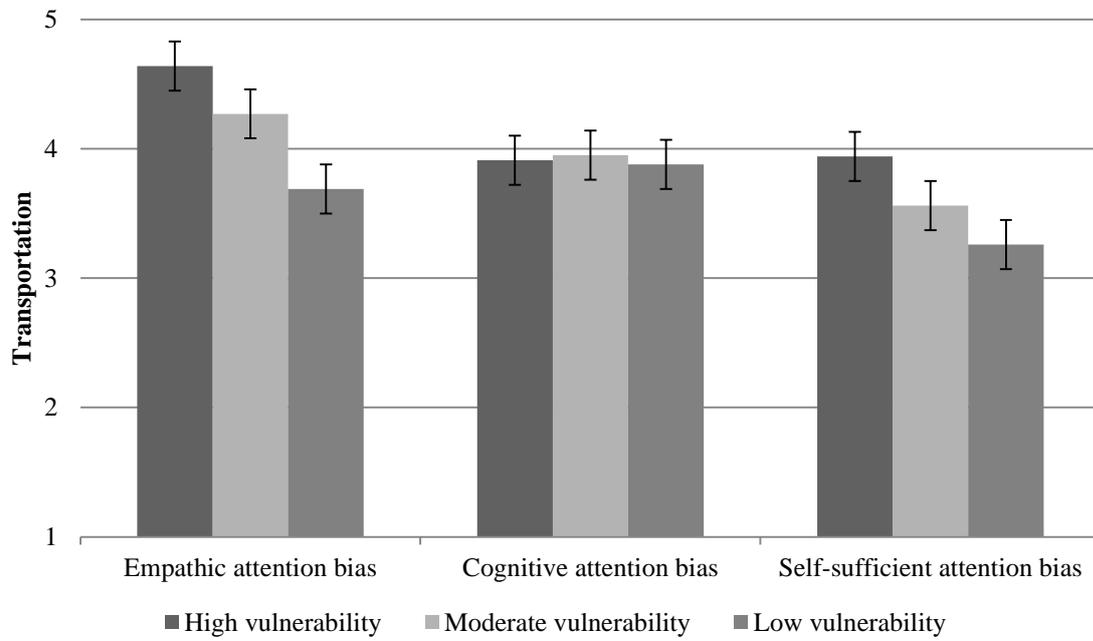


Figure 5

Multi-Touch Collaboration Wall with priming words



Table 1

Pretest: Descriptive statistics

		<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>α</i>	1
1	Empathy	4.01 (.82)	.73	
	Love of money	5.99 (.66)	.75	
	Moral attentiveness	3.73 (1.01)	.90	.25**

** $p < .01$.

Table 2**Study: Descriptive statistics**

	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>α</i>	1	2	3	4
1 Acknowledgment of responsibility	42.86 (25.17)					
2 Willingness to respond	3.91 (.91)	.77				
3 Transportation	3.22 (1.29)	.76	.30**	.16**		
Love of money	3.91 (1.08)	.82				.26**
Moral attentiveness	3.63 (1.09)	.89	.12*	.21**	-.14**	
Customer orientation	6.30 (.67)	.87				-.29**
4 Selling orientation	2.16 (1.00)	.73	-.15**			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3**Study: Acknowledgment of responsibility, willingness to respond, and transportation as functions of attention bias and customer vulnerability**

Attention bias	Customer vulnerability	Acknowledgment of responsibility	Willingness to respond	Transportation
		<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)	<i>M</i> (SD)
Empathic	High	66.22 (21.69)	3.31 (1.50)	4.64 (.92)
	Moderate	51.44 (13.84)	3.64 (1.15)	4.27 (.78)
	Low	27.70 (15.44)	3.73 (1.21)	3.69 (.84)
Cognitive	High	56.90 (21.81)	3.33 (.94)	3.91 (.51)
	Moderate	48.11 (11.77)	3.02 (.86)	3.95 (.55)
	Low	22.27 (18.04)	3.03 (.92)	3.88 (.64)
Self-sufficient	High	53.53 (26.07)	2.85 (1.46)	3.94 (1.11)
	Moderate	47.21 (17.28)	2.97 (1.36)	3.56 (1.08)
	Low	19.14 (17.82)	3.01 (1.44)	3.26 (.75)

Table 4

Study: Simple contrasts for attention bias and customer vulnerability combinations on transportation

	Attention bias	Customer vulnerability	Mean difference (SE)										
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
1	Empathic	High											
2		Moderate	.47 (.17)**										
3		Low	1.02 (.21)***	.55 (.20)**									
4	Cognitive	High	.78 (.19)***	.31 (.19)	.24 (.22)								
5		Moderate	.73 (.19)***	.27 (.19)	.28 (.22)	.05 (.21)							
6		Low	.83 (.16)***	.36 (.16)*	.19 (.20)	.05 (.18)	.09 (.18)						
7	Self-sufficient	High	.82 (.18)***	.35 (.17)*	.20 (.21)	.04 (.20)	.08 (.20)	.01 (.17)					
8		Moderate	1.19 (.18)***	.72 (.18)***	.17 (.22)	.41 (.20)*	.46 (.20)*	.36 (.17)*	.38 (.19)				
		Low	1.47 (.17)***	1.00 (.17)***	.46 (.21)*	.69 (.19)***	.74 (.19)***	.64 (.16)***	.66 (.18)**	.28 (.18)			

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

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