Perceived Truthfulness in Messages with Ulterior Motives

Compliments and Criticisms in the Mind of the Receiver

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Abstract: The thesis investigates how two different types of messages (compliments and criticisms) are perceived if the receiver believes the sender has an ulterior motive. The quantitative study (a questionnaire with hypothetical scenarios) supports that the perceived truthfulness of a message correlates with the ulterior motive the receiver perceives the sender has, regardless if the message is a compliment or a criticism. The data also supports that messages with no ulterior motive are perceived as most truthful, and that messages that are congruent with the perceived ulterior motive are perceived as more truthful that those that are not. Messages that have an ulterior motive associated with selling (or wanting something back from the receiver) are perceived as the least truthful, although there seem to be a difference between economic exchange and social exchange. The thesis uses four interpersonal communications theories (Social Exchange Theories, Information Manipulation Theory, Interpersonal Deception Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory) as a theoretical background to the study.

Keywords: ulterior motives, compliments and criticisms, truthfulness

Introduction

Have you ever questioned others intentions when they utter a specific comment? Or wondered why someone you always though disliked you are suddenly being nice? My mind can sometimes work overtime with question like these. So I decided to write my thesis about it. I have always been interested in how the message can change depending on the sender's intentions. For example, I do not even stop anymore when a stranger asks me something on the street. Because nine times out of ten, they want to sell me something. Or they are begging for money, and I no longer carry any cash. I often wonder why companies and NGO:s still use the tactic of speaking to people when they pass by (Fisher, 2006), when, in my mind, it cannot work very well. And it should seriously hurt the goodwill and brand of the organization, in that they are bothering people when they are stressed out in the world. I have similarly found it interesting in a more personal plane. If I am, for example, out for a drink with someone, and get the impression the person I am with really likes me, but I am kind of indifferent, I often question the truthfulness of everything they say, in the back of my mind. Because I know how much I can adapt myself to someone when I am really attracted. So with this thesis, I want to investigate if others have the same reaction to messages when they suspect ulterior motives, or if I am just weirdly paranoid like that.

So, for my thesis, I wanted to find out how a message is perceived by the receiver if they suspect that the sender has an agenda. My question formulation is therefore; **does the perceived truthfulness of a compliment or criticism change for the receiver if the receiver believes the sender has an ulterior motive?** That's the one question that opens up the more specific questions of the work. For example: do you believe a compliment more or less if you believe the sender is sexually attracted to you? How do you receive a criticism if you think someone does not like you? Do you believe they are less or more truthful? How does it work when the (suspected) relational aspects and message is incongruent (criticism with liking, compliments with not liking)? Do you believe the message more or less? All these are questions I like to answer.

But why investigate something like this, you might ask. Well, truthfulness is an important thing in communication. Anne Ozar (2013) claims, for example, that "[i]n order for language-use to be successful, most members of a linguistic community must be able to rely on the transparency of the communicative intentions of most other members of that community" (Ozar, 2013). Jens Allwood, David Traum and Kristiina Jokinen also discuss giving correct information in regards to ethics:

> In order to successfully act adequately and competently, we must have correct information, otherwise we cannot judge if the appropriate preconditions for a certain course of action are present. This directly implies that we should not lie or mislead. If we do this, the other person's possibilities of obtaining the desired outcomes through the exercise of his/her rationality are radically diminished. This does not mean that rational action has to be based on correct information. Rational action can be based on both correct and incorrect information. It only means that the likelihood of successfully achieving one's goal, in the long run, is greater if action is based on correct rather than incorrect information (Allwood, Traum, & Jokinen, 2000, p. 876).

So both for linguistic communication to work within a group, and for the highest likelihood of individuals receiving their goals, it is important to get the correct information from others. And that's what truthfulness is, giving and/or receiving the correct information. These are two great reasons as to why the subject of truthfulness and ulterior motives is important in communication research.

Theory

I will start to introduce four different interpersonal communication theories that give a theoretical background to the thesis. The literature was mostly found in a compendium of interpersonal theories edited by Leslie Baxter and Dawn Braithwaite (2008). Other literature was found by searching for the different theories, and different combinations of keywords like "messages", "compliment" "criticism", "interpersonal communication" "ulterior motives", "goals" , "suspicion" ,"deception", "truthfulness", "truth", "lying" and "intentions" in Google Scholar, Chalmers Library and The University of Gothenburg Library.

The theories I have decided to use are Social Exchange Theories, Information Manipulation Theory, Interpersonal Deception Theory and Communication Accommodation Theory. The theories are chosen because they seemed to me the best ones to explain the specific communication I was writing about. They are all, as stated, interpersonal communication theories, but not necessarily within the exact same framework. All belong to the post-positivistic world view, in that they "presume an objective reality whose underlying cause-and-effect patterns can be discovered through scientific method" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 146), but Social Exchange Theories are from the relationship-centered theories of interpersonal communication while the other three are from the discourse/interaction centered theories of interpersonal communication. Relationship-centered theories focus "on understanding the role of communication in developing, sustaining, and terminating social and personal relationships" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 281), while discourse/interaction centered theories of interpersonal communication "were developed with a goal of predicting and explaining patterned regularities among key communication variables" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 146). Social Exchange Theories is not originally a communications theory; it was developed originally in psychology (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 281), but has also has its origins tied to anthropology, economics, and sociology (Sprechter, 1998, p. 32). Information Manipulation Theory and Interpersonal Deception Theory also assumes there is an objective 'truth' but that people's perception of what is true can be manipulated (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 146).

Social Exchange Theories

In Social Exchange Theories, a subject assesses the cost and the benefit of relationships (Ribarsky, 2013, pp. 29-30). How much do I put into the relationship, and how much do I get out of said relationship? Is it worth the hassle? Laura Strafford argues that "[i]ndividuals attempt to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs" of relationships (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 378). Strafford (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008) also claims, and is supported by Susan Sprechter (1998, p. 32), that when someone receives rewards from others, they feel a sense of obligation to the giver. Social exchange differs from economic exchange in that it is based on goodwill and trust instead of any legal obligation. This means that social exchange is voluntary, and "leaves the rewards and costs open" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 378-379). In economic exchange the costs and rewards are on a set timeframe, you have to pay for dinner in a restaurant after you ate and your rent is due at the end of the month (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 379). This differs from, for example, doing a favor for a friend. You

know you can ask for a favor back at some point, but when and what the favor might be are not negotiated or set beforehand.

Social exchange is based in the giving and taking of resources. These resources are viewed as a reward when they give pleasure and a cost "when they provoke pain, anxiety, embarrassment, or mental and physical effort" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 381). Different resources work differently from other resources. The resource of money is more tangible than the abstract resource of love, for example. Resources also differ on an individual level. I might value status as a resource more than you, and what is considered high status to me does not necessarily mean high status to you (Ribarsky, 2013, pp. 29-30). So what is intended as a reward from a sender, could be received as a cost to a receiver, if their values differ on fundamental levels. Strafford (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 382) defines two ways that communication works through social exchange. The first one is that communication as a negotiation tool, where I offer something, you offer something in return, and we meet somewhere in the middle. The second definition is when communication itself is the resource, and a "hurtful comment from a friend may be the cost of that friendship, and a compliment might be a reward" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 382). An aspect that makes Social Exchange Theories more complicated is that in some cases, you do have not actually traded away anything, like you would when you exchange money for services. I do not actually lose anything in paying someone else a compliment; I could actually use it on another person down the line, if it is not too specific.

Equity Theory is a Social Exchange Theory that focuses on what is seen as "fair" rather than expecting to get as much rewards you can for as little cost as possible. The theory "holds that, in addition to consideration of one's own profit, we also consider reciprocity and fairness" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 384). The point is that not just your own interests are met, but that the other party gives and receives just about the same back. Strafford writes that over time, an in-equal relationship will catch up to us, because we prefer relationships that are equitable. One of the essentials in Equity Theory is that inequity causes distress, for both parties. Strafford writes that "[i]f people prefer fairness to profits, or believe in a norm of reciprocity, then feeling guilty about our profitable relationship makes sense" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 385). This might also lead to rationalizations in in-equal relationships, where someone could try to change their perceptions of costs and rewards. You could as a sender, for example, stop seeing giving compliments as a reward just for the receiver, but also to you yourself, as you get happiness from giving them. Personally I do not think that rationalizations like these can hold up in the long run, though.

Information Manipulation Theory

Information Manipulation Theory examines how people deceive and is deceived by others. Steven McCornack (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 215-216) claims that dividing communication between truth and lies are difficult, because deception is more difficult than that. McCornack states that "[i]n everyday interaction, people rarely either tell the truth or lie. Instead, people manipulate the information they share with others in complex and subtle ways, resulting in messages that are simultaneously somewhat honest and somewhat deceptive" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 216). The closest you actually get to being

completely truthful is that you give a modified truth, a spin of the truth from your perspective (Lapinski & Levine, 2000, p. 56). There is not enough time to disclose all relevant information available in any given situation, and it would be difficult to maintain any relationship if every impulsive dark thought that came into your mind had to be discussed and analyzed all the time.

According to McCornack (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008), and also Lapinski & Levine (2000), a person can produce one of five different messages (in Information Manipulation Theory). The first one of these is a cooperative message, where you are completely honest, and give the all the information that is relevant, in an informative and truthful fashion. If you, for example, are in Alcoholics Anonymous and your sponsor asks what you did the night before, you tell them all the sordid details in how much you drank, where you where and who you spent the night with. These messages are extremely rare, as most people use information manipulation in their messages. The second type of message is the quantity violations, in which you present truthful information, but leave out important additional information. An example of quantity violations using the same AA example, you would tell your sponsor where you where and who you spent your evening with, but leave out the fact that you were drinking. The third type of message is the quality violation. This violation is deceptive in that it presents false information. In the AA example, this would be lying and saying you were home watching a movie to your sponsor, when you actually were out drinking. The fourth kind of message is the relation manipulation. Relation manipulation is when you present a message that is irrelevant to the subject at hand. This could be a classic deflection, and in the AA example it would be asking the question "don't you trust me?" as an answer to an inquiry to what you did last night. The last message type in Information Manipulation Theory is the manner violation, in which you manipulate information through vagueness and ambiguous messages. In the AA example it would be telling your sponsor that you were out last night and doing stuff, and don't give any more details than that. There are also combinations of these five different messages. The quantity violation and manner violation can for example overlap in vagueness and omission (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 220-222; Lapinski & Levine, 2000, p. 56).

Interpersonal Deception Theory

Interpersonal Deception Theory assumes that all communication is goal oriented, and that deception does not differentiate from any other sort of communication. According to Judee Burgoon and David Bueller (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008) these goals can be everything from "presenting oneself favorably to others, managing the expression of feelings and emotions in a socially acceptable way, maintaining relational harmony, easing conversational flow and persuading others to accept one's ideas and proposals" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 228). Nicholas Palomares (2009) claims that there are always one primary goal of a communication, and several secondary. The secondary goal often involves politeness (Palomares, 2009, s. 476). In the trying of achieving a goal, a communicator needs to use different strategies of what, and how to present information to get their desirable outcome. This is where you can start talking about deception. Burgoon and Bueller (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 228) describes that deception involves hiding, distorting,

misrepresenting, obfuscating or avoiding the message, but also evading detection and bolstering credibility. Deceptions have the same kind of adaption and reciprocity that occur in non-deceptive communication. Interpersonal Deception Theory also assumes that receivers are active in deceptive communications, and that they can change the outcome of a deceptive communication with their feedback, and how suspicious they are or aren't about the content (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 229).

The main purpose of Interpersonal Deception Theory is to explain how senders and receivers engage in deception and deception detection where the goals of the parties do not mesh. Burgoon and Bueller (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 229-234) have 21 propositions that they claim have proven many of them. Because this thesis is about how receivers perceive different communication I will focus on what Burgoon and Bueller (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008) has to say about the receiver in regards to their propositions:

> The same actions that enable senders to engage in strategic activity–interactivity, truth bias and sender skill–should result in senders being seen as credible and evading detection of deception. In addition, the more senders adhere to "normal", expected communication patterns, the more they should be seen as credible and evade detection of deception. Conversely, receivers have a better prospect of detecting deception if communication occurs through some noninteractive medium (such as e-mail), if receivers lack a truth bias, and if senders are unskilled communicators who display unusual behaviors (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 232).

Suspicion is also a large factor in deception detection, because they change both senders and receivers strategic and non strategic behavior (Van Swol & Braun, 2014, p. 1348). The sender will perceive the receivers suspicion when the receiver deviates from expected behavior, or signals disbelief, uncertainty, or need for more information (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 232-233). Another aspect of deception, according to a study by Nicholas Palomares (2009), is that people are usually moderately accurate to highly accurate in detecting others conversational goals (Palomares, 2009, s. 502), even if it is hard to detect the actual specific deceptions (Stiff, Kim, & Ramesh, 1992).

Communication Accommodation Theory

Howard Giles (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008) has defined accommodation in Communication Accommodation Theory like this:

> [A]ccommodation is a process concerned with how we can both reduce and magnify communicative differences between people in interaction. Accommodation is considered one of the main routes to achieving the former – and it does so by enhancing interpersonal similarities and thereby reducing uncertainties about the other. The effect of converging toward or "approximating" another has been shown to increase liking for the converger, enabling him or her to be seemed as more competent and credible (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 162-163).

So the term convergence is when you adapt towards others speech patterns, dialects, posture or other verbal and non-verbal cues. There is upwards convergence and downward convergence. Upward convergence is where you adapt to someone's more prestigious accent,

and downwards convergence is when you adapt a "more parochial, colloquial, or stigmatized speech patterns" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 163). An example of downward convergence is when a doctor explains to patients in simpler terms than medical jargon, or a parent speaking to a child. Convergence is about power, and people without power converge more often to people with power. For example vendors in a market will converge more often to their customers than vice versa. People will also converge more to others they find socially rewarding (Natalie, 1975, ss. 827-830). Divergence is the opposite of convergence, in that you use a more upward or downward accent (or switch language altogether) to separate yourself from whom you are speaking to. It is used to show dislike, or mistrust, or that the diverging party have a strong in-group that they identify with (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 163, 165) . Accommodation (convergence) and non-accommodation (divergence) "can be mutual, reciprocated, symmetrical, or asymmetrical […]. When they are symmetrical and accommodative, interpersonal relations should be particularly strengthened, but if they are mutually nonaccommodative, interpersonal relations are likely to become hostile and conflicted" (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 166).

Method

The theories are all post-positivistic, as I mentioned in the last chapter, so the thesis is written from that specific world view. Even though I present the work with the theories first, I would claim that the thesis was written with an inductive approach. I started with my own specific questions, which were based on observations I have personally done about specific aspects of communication. Then the results were collected, and the theories were then used to explain why the results are that way. Going from observation to theory is inductive, in contrast to deduction, where you go out to prove (or disprove) a theory with a study (Treadwell, 2011, pp. 24-25). The theories where not yet in my thought process when designing the questionnaire, so deduction is not really an option, I think. A quantitative questionnaire felt like the best option for the work, because the degree project focuses on the conscious thinking of the receiver, something the subjects could actually share through a questionnaire. Also, quantitative studies have more subjects, and therefore get more accurate data of the whole population, not just individual subjects (Treadwell, 2011, pp. 123-124). I used a volunteer sampling because there simply was not time for anything else. Using an inductive approach with a quantitative research is not that common (Bryman, 1988, s. 94), but according to Alan Bryman (1988) there are questions of how guided quantitative research actually is, and he claims that "quantitative research is often much more exploratory and unpredictable in outcome than its description by the advocates of qualitative research seems to imply" (Bryman, 1988, s. 97).

My question formulation is, as previously mentioned: **does the perceived truthfulness of a compliment or criticism change for the receiver if the receiver believes the sender has an ulterior motive?** I came through this formulation, through trying different ones and finding the one that specified what I wanted answered the most accurately. It took me a while to get to that point, as with many other parts of the thesis. I also had to limit the study through terms, relationship and environment. One of these was the concept of the message. The word 'message' felt like a too abstract in my mind, and I thought it a little too hard trying to explain the concept of main message in the survey to non-communication professionals without letting my personal opinions influence the result. So I decided to specifically investigate compliments and criticisms and the perceived truthfulness in them. Those two terms are already a kind of message, but you can grasp them easier, and you do not have to explain them to a layman. I did originally use the word insult instead of criticism, but the word felt too harsh so I changed it. A criticism works as a broader term, as it does not have to be as personal as an insult, and it could be constructive.

Another way of specifying the survey was to limit the relationship in the scenario to 'a person you have a neutral affection to (you do not like or dislike them)'. I suspect that the relationship, and what the emotional bond the subject has for the specific person that gives the compliment or criticisms, certainly matter a lot in any given situation. But I found it more interesting to do the study with acquaintances and strangers in mind, because most of our relationships never pass beyond that point (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2008, p. 39). It will also work better commercially, in how good compliments and criticisms work in a selling environment, where the relationship is not the central part of the interaction, the goal of

selling is (Bobrow, 2010). I chose to set the scenarios to be 'in a public environment' for similar reasons, in that people behave differently if they are in a public environment or a private one (Hogan, 2010, pp. 378-379). I have also made the decision to use the older terms of sender and receiver to show who is the more active party in the communication, instead of one more accurate term like co-communicator (Allwood, 2002, p. 2). This is also so I could specify that it is in the more passive participant of the communication my interest mostly lies.

Questionnaire

The complete questionnaire can be found in Appendix I. Data collection was done online with a volunteer sampling. The questionnaire was designed in Google Forms, and spread trough Facebook. I later used Google Sheets, to sort and calculate the results (raw data can be found in Appendix II). I will present the data through average and median numbers and graphs, to illustrate the differences between the different ulterior motives, and compliments and criticisms. I designed the questionnaire myself, with the rationalization that if you are going to do a questionnaire you should at least ask the questions you want answers to, and not just make it easy and redo someone else's study with a smaller sample size. I was, however, a tiny bit inspired by studies made by Park & Ahn (2007) and McLaren & Solomon (2008). The seven point scale and the term truthfullness came from them.

The questionnaire can be divided into four different parts. The first part of the questionnaire is information about the subject and consists of questions 1 to 3, which asks about the participants' gender, age and nationality. The second part is just question 4, and relates to how the different participants values truthfulness from the people around them on a scale from one and seven. The third part is about the participants' reaction to criticism, and it involves five questions (questions 5 to 9), also with a scale of one and seven. The questions puts up a scenario and asks of the participants' view of the truthfulness of another person's criticism if they suspected that the person disliked, was sexually attracted to them, wanted a favor, was trying to sell them something or had no ulterior motive towards the subject. The last part was about the participants' reaction to compliments, and also had five questions (question 10-14). The questions were identical with the third part of the questionnaire but had the word "compliment" in place of "criticism". In the third and fourth part the participants did rate on a scale between one and seven in how truthful they would believe someone was if they suspected (or not) ulterior motives. One was "not at all" truthful and seven "completely" truthful.

Results

The complete raw data of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix II. My study had **65** subjects and **72.3%** where female and **76.92%** described Swedish as their nationality (or one of their nationalities). Other nationalities (including some with dual nationalities, with Swedish sometimes being one of them) participating in the study where Spanish, Iranian, Italian, German, Canadian, American, Finnish, Australian, Vietnamese, Russian, Indian, Egyptian, Chinese and Saudi. The average age was **30.6** years old (median **29**), with the oldest subject being 72 years of age and the youngest 16 years old. Truthfulness was received as important for most of the subjects, with an average of **5.72** (one being not at all important, seven being extremely important). No other question on the survey had a higher average than that. For the results of the criticism and compliment part of the study I have made this graph (Average Results of Questionnaire sorted by Question), to get a better overview of the results:
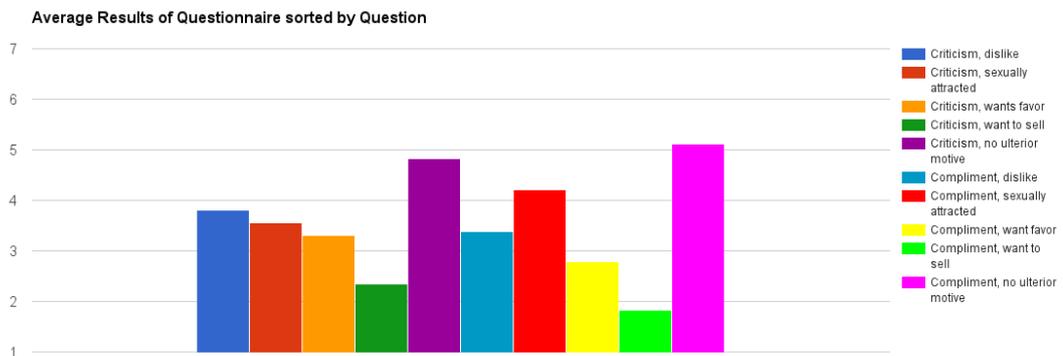
So, the three highest perception of truthfulness in this part of the study came when the subject in the hypothetical scenario did not suspect any ulterior motives (average **5.11** for compliments, and **4.83** for criticism) or when the subject got a compliment for someone they suspected was sexually attracted to them (**4.22**). In the third and fourth part of the questionnaire, one was described as 'not at all truthful' and seven being 'completely truthful'. The two lowest perceptions of truthfulness came when the subject suspected that the compliment or criticism came from someone who was trying to sell them something (**1.83** for compliment, **2.34** for criticism). The third lowest result came when the subject suspected that the one giving them a compliment wanted a favor from them (**2.78**). That leaves the other four bars in the middle (with criticism and dislike at **3.8**, criticism and sexually attracted at **3.55**, compliment and dislike at **3.38** and criticism and wants favor at **3.31**). Another way of looking at the results as median (the graph Median Results of Questionnaire), instead of average:

Median Results of Questionnaire
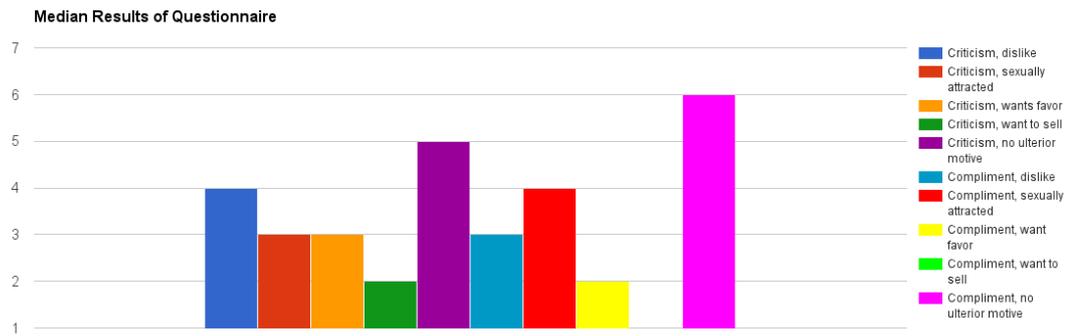
In three of these bars the median was almost a full number away from the average, which can indicate that the average is not the best way to present the data in those cases (Treadwell, 2011, p. 91). The median for compliment with no ulterior motive was **6**, instead of just over five. For a compliment and the suspicion that someone wants to sell the subject something, the median were **1**, instead of just under two. And with a compliment combined with the suspicion the sender wanting a favor, the median was **2** instead of closer to three. When I go back to the average data and sort it in another way (the graph Average Results of Questionnaire sorted by Ulterior Motive) I also get some other interesting results:

Average Results of Questionnaire sorted by Ulterior Motive
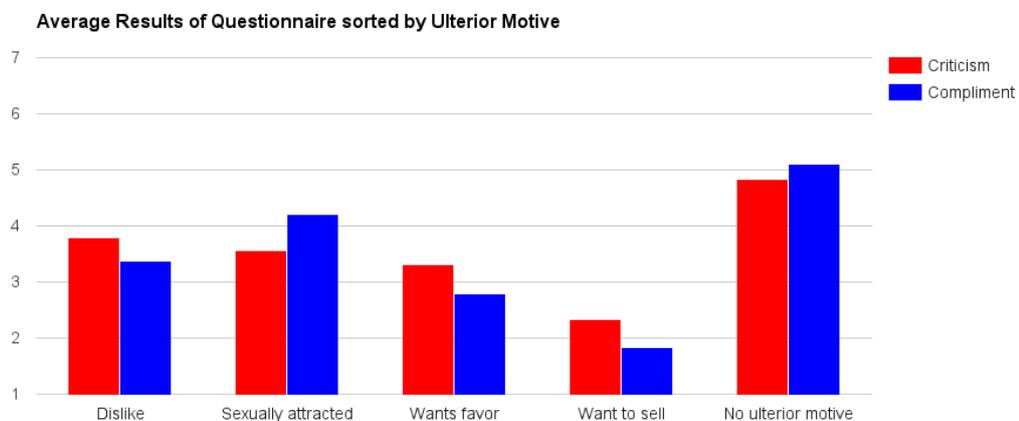
The different suspected ulterior motives match each other, regardless if the message is a compliment or a criticism. Only in the bars that refers to sexual attraction that the difference between the two bars more than around **0.5**. Though three of the five ulterior motives are close to the average of the surveys third and fourth parts (**3.52**), **the data clearly suggest a correlation between different ulterior motives and truthfulness in compliments and criticisms**. Or at least when this small sample group are asked about it in a hypothetical scenario.

Discussion

So, what can you take from all this study and these theories? Well, first of all, the study shows that even though it shows that people value truthfulness, it also shows that they really do not believe others are being truthful when complimenting or criticizing them. I mean averages around five (**5.11** for compliments, and **4.83** for criticism) when you believe someone has no ulterior motive looks good in the data, but it is still pretty cynical if you think about it. Even when you do not suspect anyone has an agenda there still more two more levels to being completely truthful! Thought this might have to do with that the survey specified the sender as someone the receiver has neutral affection to. People are more suspicious to strangers and acquaintances than people they are close to (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2008, pp. 39-44). But then, why would people actually believe others to be truthful? Even if we are just talking about something as harmless as Communication Accommodation Theory, people still adapt to others verbal and non-verbal behavior (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 163). How does it influence our perception of truthfulness and honesty if we adapt to others subconsciously? Are we still honest if you start to use the language of others when interacting? It is actually complicated thing to discuss, and I am not sure if there is a good answer. And this is also before I take into account all those small lies of presenting yourself in a better light, managing feelings and emotions, maintaining the harmony in relationships or to persuade others. Or all the ways Interpersonal Deception Theory refers to how we lie (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 228). Another aspect of it all, are in the Social Exchange Theories. If everything is cost vs. benefit (or fairness with Equity Theory) can you actually look at compliments and criticisms as social currency (or resources as Strafford (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 381) refers to it)? And if that is true, how would it influence the truthfulness, if you use compliments more to get something for yourself through others sense of obligation rather than actually saying what you mean? As with all good research it seems that the results of this study has just given me more questions, than actual answers.

One of the things the study indicates is that when people act congruent to the suspected ulterior motive, they are perceived as more truthful than if they do not. If the subject perceives that someone is sexually attracted to them, a compliment is perceived more truthful than a criticism (average compliment at **4.22**, average criticism at **3.55**). And if they suspect someone does not like them, a criticism is perceived as more truthful than a compliment (average compliment at **3.38,** average criticism at **3.8**,). This, and the fact that 'no ulterior motive' ranked highest on the perceived truthful average (compliment at **5.11**, criticism at **4.83**), indicates that although more cooperative messages (from Information Manipulation Theory) are perceived as more truthful, they are not perceived as truthful as to not having any ulterior motive at all. Remember, having no ulterior motive does not mean you are not lying, it just means that you do not have any specific agenda to lie for. Or that the receiver has not yet figured out your agenda. The last part are unlikely though, in that people are usually aware of others conversational goals (Palomares, 2009, s. 502).

On the other end of the spectrum, wanting to sell something, and (especially) giving compliments are not perceived as truthful at all (average compliment at **1.83**, average criticism at **2.34**). With a median of one, it means that more than half of the participants of the

questionnaire had to rate the combination of compliments and 'trying to sell something' at the lowest possible number. So the ulterior motive of 'trying to sell something' is seen as not at all truthful in regards to compliments. This ulterior motive could involve many different truth violations (in Information Manipulation Theory). I hypothesize that most people see it as a quality violation, that when someone pays them a compliment and are trying to sell something, they do not mean it at all. It would correspond well with Social Exchange Theory, in that the seller is giving a compliment in hope to get a sale back, instead of any actual truth to the compliment. Although you could also argue that a compliment while selling something could actually be a relations violation, in that the compliment has nothing to do with what is actually being sold. It would actually depend on the compliment, I guess.

It is also interesting to see the differences between the ulterior motive of 'trying to sell something' (average compliment at **1.83**, average criticism at **2.34**), and 'want a favor' (average compliment at **2.78**, average criticism at **3.31**). It seems that truthfulness in social exchange is perceived better than in an economic exchange. Could it be that leaving the rewards and costs open (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, pp. 378-379) could actually have an influence of how we perceive truthfulness? The data could support that, although a more specified study should be needed to draw any lasting conclusion. One other interesting thing with these two ulterior motives, are that the criticism is regarded as more truthful than the compliment. This, I believe also goes back to the Social Exchange Theory, and the fact that when you give the resource (or pleasure) of a compliment, you might want to make the giver feel so obliged to you that they give another resource back (them to buy something from you, or a do you favor) to make the exchange equal. Giving a criticism in a situation where you want something from someone is doing the opposite, and in worst case scenario, is actually a cost (discomfort) for the other person. The same obligation and expectation to make the exchange equal is not there, and therefore the criticism is seen as more truthful than the compliment. Or this is how I hypothesize it works in the suspicious mind of the receiver.

Conclusion

Summary

So, to summarize, **there is a correlation between ulterior motives and perceived truthfulness from the receiver**. Messages (in this case compliments and criticisms) are perceived as the most truthful if the receiver does not suspect an ulterior motive, and the least truthful if the receiver suspect the sender are trying to sell them something. Messages that are congruent with the suspected ulterior motive (for example not liking with a criticism, sexual attraction with a compliment) are seen as more truthful than messages that are not. Compliments that are used when the sender is suspected to want a resource back are seen as less truthful than criticisms in the same scenario. And that others are being truthful are really important to the subjects of the study.

Practical Contributions

There are numerous places to use the findings in this study to you advantage, both on a personal level and commercially. The first thing should be that people who are selling something should be upfront about it, and never, ever try to compliment their customers (or even criticize them). And if you have to be deceptive in a selling environment, you should not approach anyone on the street. As mentioned in Interpersonal Deceptions Theory, for deception to go unnoticed you need to use normal and expected paths of communications (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 232), and (at least in Swedish culture) there is nothing normal about starting conversations with strangers on the street in broad daylight. But the best way to be perceived as truthful is to actually not have any ulterior motive, and if you cannot do that, at least act congruent with the ulterior motive that you have. Remember, people are mostly aware of the conversational goals of others (Palomares, 2009, s. 502), which makes it hard to appear as if you have no ulterior motive when you actually have one. If the results of this study would translate beyond the interpersonal communication, to people using social media, online stores, telemarketing or even advertising, it should become really interesting. What if advertisements actually stopped pandering to potential customers, and you actually could start to believe the messages that companies sends to the public? Wouldn't that be great? It is never going to happen, but it is a nice thought.

Limitations

Most of the limitations of this thesis are choices I have made in the process of writing the work. The first one I can think about is that I am mostly interested in the conscious mind of the subjects, when there are a lot of things that happens subconsciously. I believe this is especially true when someone is trying to sell you something. What people say they do, and what they actually do or feel does not always correlate, as much of the Theories section have pointed out to us. I have mostly ignored this in my thesis, in that I would have to do a whole other study to make any conclusions about subconscious behavior. Using the terms compliment and criticism has also had its problems, in that some (mostly younger) participants would not believe any compliment that they would hypothetically be given in the scenario. This could make the data a little harder to translate to other sorts of messages, I believe. I would have also wanted more participants as a whole. 65 participants is an okay

number, although it is nowhere close to the 1200 randomly selected people that Treadwell (2011, p. 15) claims are needed for an accurate depiction of public opinion in the United States. It is, nonetheless, a too small sample size to separate into sub-groups depending on nationality, gender or age, and seeing if there are any differences between the groups (Treadwell, 2011, pp. 108-109). That the data is also skewed towards females and Swedish people are within itself a sort of limitation, in that it is not reflective of the general population. Although according to Treadwell (2011):

> "All sampling ultimately is based on judgments by the researcher and as a result has an inbuilt bias. For example, a researcher interviewing only her friends is likely to select in people that are similar to her and to select out people who are different. This may be deliberate and defensible, but it is more likely to be a decision of convenience that will bias the sample by reducing the diversity (Treadwell, 2011, p. 112).

So there will always be bias, so all you really can do is to let people know what way your data is skewed, so they can take that into account when assessing the work.

Further studies

Making a similar study that focuses on what impact the relationships has in regards compliments and criticisms should be interesting. I would also like to try using other messages than compliments and criticisms to see if there is something unique to those two, or if they work like messages in general. Similarly, making a study completely from the perspective of the five different types of messages in Information Manipulation Theory, and the perceived truthfulness from the receiver of each type of message feels like something someone should do. And if you go away from questionnaires, a qualitative study that takes into account the subconscious behavior with ulterior motives would be great. Maybe making a more focused study on the differences between social exchange and economic exchange, now that this study implies that the truthfulness is perceived differently between the both. But these are just of the top of my head. I feel like there are a lot of interesting things in how we perceive messages when there are ulterior motives involved.

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Appendix I

Appendix I

Perceived truthfulness and ulterior motives

A survey about if the perceivements of criticisms and compliments change in the mind of the reciever if the sender has an ulterior motive.

En undersökning om mottagarens uppfattning av kritik och komplimanger förändras om sändaren har en baktanke.

* Required

1. **What is your gender?** *
   Vilket kön har du?
   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Female (kvinna)

   ◯ Male (man)

2. **How old are you?** *
   Hur gammal är du?

   ....

3. **What is your nationality?** *
   Vilken nationalitet har du?

   ....

4. **How important is it that others are being truthful to you?** *
   Hur viktigt är det för dig att andra är sanningsenliga mot dig?
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Extremely (extremt)

5. **Imagine a scenario where a person you have a neutral affection to (you do not like or dislike them) criticizes you in a public enviroment. On a scale to one and seven, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their criticism if you suspect that they dislike you?** *
   Tänk på ett scenario då en person du har neutrala känslor mot (du varken ogillar eller gillar dem) kritiserar dig på en allmän plats. På en skala mellan ett och sju, hur sanningsenliga i sin kritik tror du de är om du misstänker att de ogillar dig?
   Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

6. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their criticism if you suspect that they are sexually attracted to you? ***

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin kritik tror du de är om du misstänker att de är sexuellt attraherade av dig?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

7. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their criticism if you suspect that they want a favor from you? ***

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin kritik tror du de är om du misstänker att de vill att du skulle göra dem en tjänst?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

8. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their criticism if you suspect that they are trying to sell you something? ***

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin kritik tror du de är om du misstänker att de försöker sälja någonting till dig?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

9. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their criticism if you suspect that they have no ulterior motive? ***

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin kritik tror du de är om du misstänker att de inte har någon baktanke?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

10. **Imagine a scenario where a person you have a neutral affection to (you do not like or dislike them) compliments you in a public enviroment. On a scale to one and seven, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their compliment if you suspect that they dislike you?** *

Tänk på ett scenario då en person du har neutrala känslor mot (du varken ogillar eller gillar dem) ger dig en komplimang på en allmän plats. På en skala mellan ett och sju, hur sanningsenliga i sin komplimang tror du de är om du misstänker att de ogillar dig?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

11. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their compliment if you suspect that they are sexually attracted to you?** *

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin komplimang tror du de är om du misstänker att de var sexuellt attraherade av dig?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

12. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their compliment if you suspect that they want a favor from you?** *

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin komplimang tror du de är i sin komplimang om du misstänker att de vill att du skulle göra dem en tjänst?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

13. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their compliment if you suspect they are trying to sell you something?** *

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin komplimang tror du de är om du misstänker att de försöker sälja någonting till dig?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

2015-04-22   Perceived truthfulness and ulterior motives

14. **In the same scenario, how much would you believe that they are being truthful in their compliment if you suspect that they have no ulterior motive? ***

I samma scenario, hur sanningsenliga i sin komplimang tror du de är om du misstänker att de inte har någon baktanke?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Not at all (inte alls)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Completely (fullständigt)

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Google Forms

Appendix II

Timestamp	Gender	Age	Nationality	Truthfullness, importance	Criticism, dislike	Criticism, sexually attracted	Criticism, wants favor	Criticism, want to sell	Criticism, no ulterior motive	Compliment, dislike	Compliment, sexually attracted	Compliment, want favor	Compliment, want to sell	Compliment, no ulterior motive	ALL SUBJECTS
4/22/2015 11:12:18	Female (kvinna)	24	svensk	6	4	5	4	4	4	1	7	3	3	7	
4/22/2015 11:13:57	Female (kvinna)	34	Swedish	7	4	3	4	4	2	3	2	2	1	1	
4/22/2015 11:18:37	Female (kvinna)	27	swedish	6	3	4	4	1	6	3	2	2	1	6	
4/22/2015 11:30:23	Male (man)	32	svensk	6	5	4	3	1	5	5	6	4	1	6	
4/22/2015 11:33:55	Female (kvinna)	24	Swedish	6	5	5	5	3	3	4	5	2	1	1	
4/22/2015 12:00:18	Female (kvinna)	28	swede	6	6	4	4	4	6	2	5	5	5	6	
4/22/2015 12:03:54	Female (kvinna)	25	Saudi	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	6	6	6	5	
4/22/2015 12:09:43	Female (kvinna)	27	Swedish	6	3	2	4	3	6	2	6	4	3	6	
4/22/2015 12:09:50	Male (man)	32	swedish	5	5	6	6	1	7	6	7	2	2	5	
4/22/2015 12:21:34	Male (man)	34	svensk	4	2	2	2	1	5	1	4	2	1	6	
4/22/2015 12:22:46	Female (kvinna)	52	Svensk	6	2	2	2	2	1	3	3	2	1	2	
4/22/2015 12:32:43	Male (man)	32	Svensk	4	2	4	3	2	6	3	5	4	2	6	
4/22/2015 12:37:11	Female (kvinna)	50	svensk	7	2	2	3	3	2	3	5	4	3	4	
4/22/2015 12:37:47	Female (kvinna)	62	svensk	6	3	4	7	6	7	6	2	2	2	6	
4/22/2015 12:41:07	Female (kvinna)	38	Chinese	5	4	4	1	1	1	4	2	6	6	5	
4/22/2015 12:42:12	Male (man)	32	svensk	6	5	6	4	1	6	5	3	4	1	6	
4/22/2015 12:42:16	Male (man)	44	Svensk	5	3	4	5	6	6	2	6	3	2	6	
4/22/2015 12:53:59	Female (kvinna)	29	svensk	6	2	3	1	1	5	3	4	3	1	5	
4/22/2015 13:02:24	Female (kvinna)	25	german	7	2	6	3	1	4	6	6	3	4	7	
4/22/2015 13:23:24	Male (man)	24	Swedish	6	6	2	2	1	7	6	3	1	1	6	
4/22/2015 13:32:02	Female (kvinna)	34	svensk	7	4	5	2	2	6	6	3	2	2	7	
4/22/2015 13:33:34	Female (kvinna)	25	Swedish	5	2	4	4	1	3	2	6	4	1	2	
4/22/2015 13:54:30	Female (kvinna)	37	svensk	5	2	2	2	2	6	1	1	1	1	7	
4/22/2015 14:01:13	Male (man)	22	German	6	2	3	4	1	4	1	2	1	1	4	
4/22/2015 14:34:46	Male (man)	19	sverige	6	6	2	1	1	7	4	3	2	2	5	
4/22/2015 15:03:13	Female (kvinna)	23	Egyptian	7	6	2	6	6	7	2	6	2	2	7	
4/22/2015 15:05:03	Male (man)	16	Sweden	7	7	3	4	3	6	3	2	5	2	6	
4/22/2015 15:22:48	Female (kvinna)	24	Swedish and Indian	7	5	3	1	1	6	1	4	1	1	6	
4/22/2015 15:44:42	Female (kvinna)	28	Svensk	6	7	1	1	1	2	4	3	2	1	6	
4/22/2015 16:26:05	Female (kvinna)	27	Svensk	6	3	7	3	3	6	2	6	2	1	7	
4/22/2015 16:49:37	Female (kvinna)	34	Russia	5	3	3	3	1	5	3	4	2	2	6	
4/22/2015 18:39:00	Male (man)	31	swedish	6	5	3	2	2	6	5	2	3	1	2	
4/22/2015 18:50:38	Male (man)	33	svensk	6	5	5	4	3	6	3	5	4	1	6	
4/22/2015 19:05:39	Female (kvinna)	29	Vietnamese	5	2	2	1	1	2	4	4	2	1	2	
4/22/2015 19:37:08	Female (kvinna)	26	australien	5	6	2	5	7	6	6	6	3	1	7	
4/22/2015 19:50:43	Female (kvinna)	31	finnish	7	1	4	4	1	7	4	4	1	1	7	
4/22/2015 20:35:04	Female (kvinna)	26	Albanian	6	3	1	1	4	5	2	5	1	1	3	
4/22/2015 21:42:23	Female (kvinna)	29	US, Sweden	4	3	5	4	2	6	3	2	4	1	5	
4/22/2015 22:46:35	Female (kvinna)	23	swedish	4	2	7	7	3	5	1	5	5	5	7	
4/23/2015 9:21:21	Male (man)	33	swedish	6	4	5	5	2	6	2	5	3	1	6	
4/23/2015 9:53:05	Female (kvinna)	18	Svensk	6	5	2	2	2	4	2	7	3	2	7	
4/23/2015 11:36:48	Female (kvinna)	29	svensk	5	4	3	3	2	5	2	6	4	2	5	
4/23/2015 12:06:35	Female (kvinna)	44	svensk	5	4	4	4	2	5	2	5	2	1	4	
4/23/2015 12:24:54	Female (kvinna)	18	Sweden	5	2	7	7	3	3	7	2	2	1	1	
4/23/2015 15:25:34	Female (kvinna)	27	canadian	6	2	2	2	1	4	2	6	2	1	6	
4/23/2015 19:36:40	Female (kvinna)	72	svensk	6	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	2	2	5	
4/23/2015 20:57:42	Female (kvinna)	26	German & Spanish	6	6	3	2	1	6	5	3	2	3	6	
4/23/2015 21:13:06	Male (man)	50	Swedish	4	2	3	4	3	5	2	3	2	1	4	
4/23/2015 21:13:23	Female (kvinna)	26	German	7	2	3	6	2	3	4	3	2	1	3	
4/23/2015 21:33:06	Female (kvinna)	27	svensk	4	7	3	6	4	5	2	6	3	2	5	
4/23/2015 21:55:18	Female (kvinna)	26	svensk	6	2	2	2	2	5	2	4	2	2	6	
4/24/2015 0:11:31	Female (kvinna)	29	svensk	5	4	1	3	3	4	6	7	5	2	7	
4/27/2015 11:59:00	Male (man)	25	svensk	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	
4/27/2015 12:18:56	Female (kvinna)	36	svensk	4	6	3	3	3	6	3	3	3	3	6	
4/27/2015 12:43:16	Female (kvinna)	22	Svensk	6	6	3	4	2	6	3	6	3	2	6	
4/27/2015 17:02:18	Female (kvinna)	23	Italian	6	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	4	
4/27/2015 17:32:03	Male (man)	31	Swedish	6	3	2	2	1	6	6	4	3	1	6	
4/27/2015 17:36:40	Male (man)	22	Swedish	5	3	6	2	4	5	6	5	2	2	5	
4/27/2015 17:38:24	Female (kvinna)	17	Svensk	6	3	4	4	3	5	2	5	3	3	6	
4/27/2015 19:03:59	Male (man)	20	Svensk	6	3	6	1	2	1	7	6	4	1	3	
4/27/2015 19:38:18	Female (kvinna)	36	Svensk	6	5	4	2	2	3	2	6	2	2	2	
4/27/2015 22:49:19	Female (kvinna)	38	swedish	6	6	3	2	1	6	7	5	5	2	7	
4/28/2015 8:49:50	Female (kvinna)	29	Swedish	7	6	6	3	1	6	4	6	3	1	5	
4/30/2015 20:02:26	Female (kvinna)	38	Iranian/Swedish	7	4	4	4	1	5	2	1	2	1	6	
5/1/2015 12:26:38	Female (kvinna)	35	spanish	7	5	6	6	4	7	5	2	2	1	5	
	Female: 47		Swedish: 50												
	Male: 18		Non Swedish: 15												
AVERAGE	**Female: 72.3%**	**30.8**	**Swedish 76.92%**	**5.723076923**	**3.8**	**3.553846154**	**3.307692308**	**2.338461538**	**4.630769231**	**3.384615385**	**4.215384615**	**2.784615385**	**1.830769231**	**5.107692308**	3.515384615
MEDIAN		**29**		**6**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**5**	**3**	**4**	**2**	**1**	**6**	4