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RAJIV VAIDYANATHAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

LABOVITZ SCHOOL OF BUSINESS & ECONOMICS, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA DULUTH
11 E. SUPERIOR ST. SUITE 210, DULUTH, MN 55802

Phone: 218-726-7853 ✦ E-Mail: acr@acrwebsite.org

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Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 11 E. Superior Street, Suite 210, Duluth, MN 55802

The Selfish Side of Sharing: Effects of Need For Control on Advice Giving

Alessandro Peluso, University of Salento, Italy

Andrea Bonezzi, New York University, USA

Derek D. Rucker, Northwestern University, USA

Matteo De Angelis, LUISS University, Italy

Advice giving is typically considered an altruistic behavior driven by empathic concern for others. The present research examines the hypothesis that advice giving is not always driven by empathy. Three experiments find that consumers sometimes provide advice to fulfill a self-serving motive to restore a lost sense of personal control.

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Sharing Information: A Focus on the Sharer's Motives and Feelings

Chair: Troy Campbell, Duke University, USA

Paper #1: The Selfish Side of Sharing: Effects of Need for Control on Advice Giving

Alessandro M. Peluso, University of Salento and LUISS University, Italy
Andrea Bonezzi, New York University, USA
Matteo De Angelis, LUISS University, Italy
Derek D. Rucker, Northwestern University, USA

Paper #2: The Altruistic Side of Sharing: Giving Misery Company by Sharing Personal Negative Experiences

Troy Campbell, Duke University, USA
Dan Ariely, Duke University, USA

Paper #3: La vie en Rose at the Top? Why Positive (Negative) Information goes Up (Down) in a Hierarchy

Christilene du Plessis, INSEAD, France
David Dubois, INSEAD, France

Paper #4: The Negative Consequences of Empowering Consumers and Employees

Tami Kim, Harvard Business School, USA
Leslie K. John, Harvard Business School, USA
Todd Rogers, Harvard Business School, USA
Michael I. Norton, Harvard Business School, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW

Sharing information goes by many names: word of mouth, recommendations, information transmission, voting, gossiping, or in modern times “tweeting.” Acts of sharing are one of (if not *the*) strongest influences on many consumer behaviors, influencing both the sharer and recipient of the information. Accordingly, many businesses have sought to drive and guide sharing behavior.

However, both businesses and academics remain blind to many of the underlying factors that surrounding sharing, particularly issues surrounding the sharer. Although academics have extensively examined how recipients respond to sharers' recommendations and general social influences, much less is known about the sharer. Particularly what motivates the sharer? And how does the sharer feel about transmitting different types information, to different types of people, in different types of situations?

The first paper by Peluso, Bonezzi, and De Angelis begins by examining a selfish side of advice giving, specifically examining how a motive to gain a sense of personal control leads people to share advice (even advice that may hurt recipients) to fulfill this motive. Campbell and Ariely complement the first paper by presenting an altruistic side of sharing, finding people share personal negative experiences they wish not to share in order to provide others with beneficial social comparison. The second paper also examines the influence of differences in valence of shared content and personal relationship with the recipient. Du Plessis and Dubois pick up on the topics of valence and relation to the recipient in the case of hierarchies, finding that people tend to share positive information up the hierarchy ladder and negative information down the ladder. The authors propose that arousal underlies these patterns. Kim and colleagues finish the session by examining a specific case of communication in ahierarchy: that between stakeholders (e.g. consumers, employees) and the larger firm. The authors critically examine the popular trend of firms (e.g. Facebook) inviting stakeholders to share opinions and vote on issues. Though seeming a positive step toward

giving stakeholders a feeling of influence and autonomy, the authors find many negative consequences for both firms and stakeholders.

In addition to the theme of feelings and motives, many of the papers tackle other overlapping themes, specifically: the trading off of sharer and recipient welfare (paper 1 and 2), the valence of transmitted information (paper 2 and 3), recipient characteristics (paper 2 and 3), hierarchies (paper 3 and 4), and feelings of control (paper 1 and 4).

In sum, this session seeks to reaffirm how basic consumer research can make a big difference in a modern world of increasingly sharing behavior. All the benefits of sharing, tweeting, and word of mouth hinge on a potential sharer actually choosing to share. Accordingly, understanding what motivates the sharer and how the sharer feels about sharing is fundamentally important if one wishes to promote any type of sharing from peer-to-peer tweeting to good ol' fashioned face-to-face word of mouth.

The Selfish Side of Sharing: Effects of Need for Control on Advice Giving

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Consumers' purchasing decisions are often influenced by information provided by others in the form of advice (Cheema and Kaikati 2010; De Bruyn and Lilien 2008; Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004). Previous literature has often conceptualized advice giving as an altruistic behavior driven by empathic concern for others (Goldsmith and Fitch 1997; Liu and Gal 2011). From this perspective, consumers provide advice to improve or protect others' well-being (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998).

Despite the intuitive validity of this argument, we suggest that a self-serving motive, and not empathic concern, sometimes drives advice giving. We argue that consumers sometimes provide advice to fulfill a self-serving motive to restore a lost sense of personal control. Building on the notion that consumers experiencing a threat to their sense of control seek means to restore control (Kay et al. 2008; Whitson and Galinsky 2008), we suggest that giving advice can provide one means of accomplishing such an objective. Thus, we propose that individuals with a need to restore control are more likely to give advice than individuals who do not have such a need.

Experiment 1 tested whether individuals who experience a temporary need to restore control are more likely to give advice than individuals without this need. Moreover, we also tested whether this tendency is stronger for individuals with a higher chronic desire for control (Burger and Cooper 1979; Gebhardt and Brosschot 2002). Eighty-two participants were assigned to either a need to restore control condition or a no need to restore control condition of a between-participants design, with chronic desire for control serving as a continuous measured variable. We manipulated personal control via threat, using an episodic recall task (Whitson and Galinsky 2008). We then asked respondents to recall a positive consumption experience, and write about it as if they were writing an email to a friend. Messages were then coded based on whether or not they contained an explicit advice or recommendation for the recipient. A logistic regression revealed a significant effect of need to restore control ($p = .05$), indicating that respondents who had a need to restore control gave advice more than respondents who did not have such a need. Moreover, this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction between need to restore control and chronic desire for control ($p = .05$), indicating that the tendency to give

advice when feeling out of control was stronger for individuals with a higher chronic desire for control ($p < .01$) compared to those with a low chronic desire for control ($p > .10$).

Experiment 2 directly tested for a differential effect of empathy and need to restore control on advice giving. We reasoned that, in situations in which providing advice may be potentially detrimental to the receiver, empathy vis-à-vis need to restore control should produce opposite effects. Specifically, individuals motivated by empathy should be more likely to refrain from giving advice, to avoid potentially hurting the recipient. In contrast, individuals motivated by a self-serving need to restore control should be more likely to give advice, as worry less about potential negative consequences for the recipient. One hundred and sixty five participants were assigned to three conditions of a between-participants design. We used an episodic recall task to activate across conditions either empathy, a need to restore control, or a neutral state (baseline). Next, respondents were asked to read a scenario describing a consumer in need of advice about applying for a fixed versus adjustable-rate mortgage. In particular, the scenario was characterized by ambiguity about the best course of action and potential for harm to the receiver if the wrong advice is provided. Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they would provide advice to the person involved in that situation. A logistic regression revealed a positive effect of need to restore control on advice giving, indicating that respondents in this condition were more likely to give advice than respondents in the baseline condition (72.2% versus 53.4%, $p = .04$). In contrast, the results showed a negative effect of empathy, indicating that respondents in this condition were less likely to give advice than respondents in the baseline condition (34% versus 53.4%, $p = .04$).

Experiment 3 tested whether the desire to engage in advice giving is attenuated when an alternative way to restore one's threatened sense of control is provided beforehand. One hundred and sixty participants were assigned to a 2 (need to restore control: present versus absent) \times 2 (opportunity for self-recovery: present versus absent) between-participants design. We manipulated personal control using an anticipatory thinking task (Rutjens et al. 2010). Half of the participants then engaged in a choice task that provided an opportunity to restore their threatened sense of control (Inesi et al. 2011). Finally, respondents were asked to recall and write about a positive experience they had with a product and indicate their propensity to advise others to buy that product ("I am definitely going to suggest to others to buy this product"; 1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree). There was a significant need to restore control by opportunity for self-recovery interaction, $p = .03$. Contrasts revealed that when no intervening opportunity for self-recovery was present, participants with a need to restore control expressed a higher intent to give advice ($M = 8.66$) than participants with no need to restore control ($M = 7.60$), $p < .001$. In contrast, when an intervening opportunity for self-recovery was present, participants' intent to give advice did not differ as a function of need to restore control, $p > .10$.

Overall, this research furthers our understanding of the motives that drive advice giving. Contrary to prior research, we show that advice giving can be motivated by a self-serving desire to restore a lost sense of control. Attesting to the compensatory role of advice giving as a means to regain a temporary threatened sense of control, our results suggest that advice giving might in fact be attenuated when an alternative way to restore control is provided.

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The Altruistic Side of Sharing: Giving Misery Company by Sharing Personal Negative Experiences

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

"The world needs people like you and me who've been knocked around by fate. 'Cause when people see us, they don't want to be us, and that makes them feel great. We provide a vital service to society!"-Avenue Q the Musical

Why do people so often share negative personal information (e.g. a fight with a spouse, a miserable product experience) when research shows focusing on one's own or another's negative personal experiences produces undesirable outcomes? (Neuman & Strack, 2000; Schwarz & Strack, 1999; Tiedens & Linton, 2001) In this paper we attempt to shed light on this puzzle. Building upon the altruism (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Monroe, 1994; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007) and social comparison theory literatures (Corcoran et al., 2011; Wills 1981), we propose that the sharing of personal negative experiences is often motivated by social altruism such that people willingly trade off personal costs to provide benefit to target-persons through the process of downward social comparison. Thus, people (who we call "supporters") share negative personal information not because they are unaware of the costs associated with focusing on negative information. Instead, supporters tell target-persons about their own negative experiences because of a conscious intention to aid target-persons based on a lay understanding of social comparison (Exline & Lobel, 1999).

In sum, the findings paint a picture of people as daily social altruists who engage in a sophisticated cost-benefit analysis of two competing forces. The first force, the *salient negative force* entails a cost for both supporter and target-person. This force focuses both parties on negative experiences, leading both parties to feel negative emotions and dissatisfaction. In contrast, the second force, a downward *social comparison force*, may benefit the target-person. When considering the combination of the two forces involved in sharing personal negative information, supporters consistently predict a personal cost for sharing such information. However, supporters predict the effect on the target-person will vary depending on whether the cost of the salient negative force or the benefit of the downward social comparison force looms larger for target-persons. Importantly, by speaking about their own negative experiences, people believe they can literally give "misery" beneficial company and are willing to become such company.

In the current project we conducted five scenario experiments to test this social altruism sharing hypothesis, assess the intuitions people have about the effects of sharing negative personal information, and understand the factors that intensify and dampen the likelihood of sharing personal negative information for socially altruistic purposes.

In the first two experiments we found supporters shared more negative (and separately less positive) personal information with a target-person who had recently experienced negative experiences and that this pattern was stronger when the target-person's negative experiences was unchangeable. In the third experiment we found the above pattern significantly occurred for targets that were and were not friends with the supporter, however the pattern was notably stronger for friends.

Experiments 4 and 5 revealed more direct evidence that this sharing behavior is intended to benefit target-persons through downward social comparison. In Experiment 4, when sharing experiences with target-persons, we found supporters not only selectively choose