



# ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

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## **Finding Vs. Receiving: How Content Acquisition Affects Sharing**

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Four studies show that how people acquire content affects whether they share it. Relative to receiving content from others, when people find content themselves, they are less sensitive to content quality and characteristics of the content itself (e.g., how interesting it is) have less of an impact on sharing.

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# When, Why, and How People Advocate

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## **Paper #1: Finding vs. Receiving: How Content Acquisition Affects Sharing**

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## **Paper #2: When is Saying Believing? Sharing Sensations after Tasting New Products**

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## **Paper #3: The Curvilinear Relationship between Attitude Certainty and Attitudinal Advocacy**

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## **Paper #4: The Power Matching Effect: The Dynamic Interplay of Communicator and Audience Power in Persuasion**

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### **SESSION OVERVIEW**

Although considerable research has explored the psychological antecedents and consequences of persuasion, very little attention has been paid to when, why, and how consumers choose to advocate on behalf of their own beliefs regarding issues or products. In this session, we define advocacy as either: (A) sharing or expressing one's opinion about an issue or product, or (B) making an explicit effort to persuade others toward one's opinion about an issue or product. Across four papers, we attempt to answer when, why, and how people choose to share their opinions, make recommendations, or persuade others, and we explore how those exposed to such advocacies react in a variety of contexts.

The current session will provide insight into the fundamental drivers of consumer advocacy and the myriad ways in which consumers respond to information sharing and persuasion attempts. Chen and Berger focus on sharing and word of mouth. They find important differences in the effects of receiving content from others versus finding it themselves: When people receive content from others, they share interesting but not boring content; however, when they find the content themselves, they do not discriminate and end up sharing both interesting and boring content. Moore, López, and De Maya focus primarily on how learning others' opinions influences consumers' product evaluations. Specifically, they investigate when and why consumers are influenced by others' opinions. They show that exposure to others' opinions impacts subsequent evaluations and purchase intentions of products, even when a participant has direct experience with the product and shows initial dislike. Interestingly, they also find that the type of information consumers receive shapes these effects: receiving more information in the form of an explanation reduces reliance on others' opinions compared to receiving relatively little explanation. Cheatham and Tormala explore the curvilinear relationship between attitude certainty and advocacy. Their findings suggest that being very high or very low in certainty can foster advocacy relative to having moderate certainty. The unexpected relationship between uncertainty and advocacy is attenuated by self-affirmation, suggesting that consumers express advocacy intentions as a way to compensate for feeling threatened by a lack

of certainty. Finally, Rucker, Dubois, and Galinsky demonstrate a power-matching effect in message generation and recipient responsiveness. Participants induced to high/low power are more convincing in their argument generation – and also more persuaded by others – when source-recipient power matches rather than mismatches. Their results offer a framework for understanding how power affects the communication and reception of persuasive messages.

Taken together, these papers provide deeper understanding of the specific experiential and social drivers of consumer advocacy. In so doing, this session offers new insight into an extremely important yet understudied topic. Consumer advocacy is a crucial component of the marketing mix and we expect that this session will attract a diverse audience, including researchers interested in persuasion, influence, advocacy, word of mouth, and power, among other topics. In addition, each paper will discuss practical applications, giving the session both theoretical and managerial importance.

### **Finding vs. Receiving: How Content Acquisition Affects Sharing**

#### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

People often share online content with others. They email videos, forward new stories, and post status updates. Consistent with the importance of this phenomenon, a great deal of recent research has begun to examine what people share and why (Berger and Milkman 2012; Chen and Berger 2013). But might how people acquire content also influence whether or not they share it? Sometimes people find content themselves (e.g., coming across it while browsing a website), while other times people receive content from others (e.g., email forwards and retweets). Might these different methods of content acquisition impact sharing, and if so, how?

We theorize that one way acquisition method impacts sharing is by affecting how people evaluate content. People tend to associate found content with themselves and received content with others. Further, people tend to hold themselves in positive regard (e.g., high self-esteem, positive illusions about themselves) and tend to be less critical of things associated with the self. Consequently, compared to received content, people should be less likely to critically process found content and thus be less attuned to underlying content characteristics (e.g., whether it is interesting or well-written). Taken together, this suggests that when people find (vs. receive) content, characteristics of the content itself should have less of an impact on whether it gets shared.

In Study 1, participants were randomly assigned to either find or receive a more or less interesting article (2x2 between subjects design). Those in the receiving condition were told to “Imagine that someone emailed you the following article.” Those in the finding condition went onto a mock online news website and flip through the newspaper by clicking the Next button located on the bottom of the page. After flipping through a couple of filler pages (which only displayed the messages “Article A/[B/C]”), participants were shown either a low or highly interesting article (pretested). After reading the content, participants indicated (1) how likely they would be to share the article and (2) how interesting they found the article.

Participants said they would be more likely to share the more interesting article, but this was moderated by acquisition method. While receivers were much more willing to share the high than the

low interest article, finders were less discriminating between the two. Moderated mediation confirms that this is driven by sensitivity to underlying content quality (interestingness in this case): While receivers were highly sensitive to content interestingness, and were thus more likely to share the high than the low interest content, finders saw less of a difference between the articles and their willingness to share was driven less by the content itself.

Study 2 provides further evidence for our theorizing in a more controlled setting. We selected one article and created high and low quality versions by adding typos. Participants followed the same finding versus receiving procedures used in study 1. Instead of rating the article on interestingness, participants indicated how well-written they found the article. Consistent with study 1, receivers were more likely to share the article without typos than the one with typos, finders were less discriminating and were equally likely to share the two. Moderated mediation shows that this is driven by finders being less sensitive to how well-written the articles were and thus making sharing decisions that are less dependent on underlying content characteristic. If our results – that finders are less sensitive to content characteristics – are indeed driven by people being less critical of things associated with themselves as we have theorized, then this effect should be attenuated among people who are more self-critical. Studies 3 and 4 test this idea.

Study 3 employs a 2 (Content quality: low vs. high interest) x self-esteem (measured) design. All participants imagined finding content and followed the same procedures used in study 1 with the addition of an implicit self-esteem measure (Bosson, Swann Jr., and Pennebaker, 2000). Not surprisingly, participants (in this case, all finders) were more willing to share the high than the low interest content, but importantly this is moderated by self-esteem. Moderated mediation shows that as finders' self-esteem decreases (i.e., as they become more critical of themselves), they become more sensitive to the underlying content characteristic (interestingness in this case), which in turn drives sharing.

Our last study further tests the role of self-esteem using a 2 (self-esteem: high vs. low) x 2 (Acquisition method: receiving vs. finding) x 2 (Content quality: low vs. high interest) between-subjects design. We manipulated self-esteem by giving participants positive or negative feedback on their performance on an unrelated task (adapted from Baumeister and Tice 1985; Forgas 1991). The rest of the study is identical to study 1. For participants in the high self-esteem condition, results were the same as the prior studies: finders' willingness to share depended less on characteristics of the content itself. Inducing low self-esteem, however, made finders look more like receivers: both finders' and receivers' willingness to share was equally sensitive to underlying content characteristics. It's only when finders are primed to be self-critical do they become more sensitive to content characteristic.

Taken together, these four studies show that *how* people acquire content affects their subsequent sharing behavior. Compared to people who received content from others, the willingness to share of people who found content themselves depended less on the characteristics of the content. Further, this was driven by people's tendency to be less critical of things associated with the self (as long as the self is seen positively). More broadly, this research contributes to understanding why people share. It is not just characteristics of the content itself, but also *how* content is acquired, that determines sharing.

## When is Saying Believing? Sharing Sensations after Tasting New Products

### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Humans, as social beings and as consumers, have a strong motivation to share their understanding, emotions, beliefs, attitudes, and inner states with others—to create a shared reality (Echterhoff, Higgins and Levine 2009; Hardin and Higgins 1996; Higgins and Pittman 2008; Rimé et al. 1999). Such shared reality motivations lead individuals to communicate with others about referents such as people and products (Higgins 2005). Shared reality motivations underlie studies demonstrating the saying-is-believing effect, which show that “a message tailored to a particular audience influences a communicator's subsequent memory and impression of the message topic” (Hausmann, Levine and Higgins 2008). Such audience tuning (Higgins 1992) implies that consumers consider their audience's point of view when sending messages (Schlosser 2005), and shows that tuning messages to match the audience's point of view can impact consumers' memory and evaluations in the direction of the “tuned” message. Shared reality effects are stronger under conditions of ambiguity, where consumers lack a coherent interpretation of a situation or, conversely, are confronted with multiple plausible interpretations (Festinger 1950; Frish and Baron 1988). Consumers can deal with ambiguity by creating a shared reality with others, allowing them to construct an audience-congruent representation of the target and attain a greater sense of certainty about what the target is actually like (Kopietz et al. 2010).

The current research uses the context of new products to explore shared reality effects. In this context, ambiguity should play a significant role, since many new products are ambiguous with respect to the product categories that they belong to (Moreau, Markman and Lehmann 2001). In four studies, we examine when and how exposure to others' opinions influences consumers' evaluations and purchase intentions for new products. Theoretically, we extend previous work on shared reality and saying-is-believing to the consumer context; more importantly, we examine several marketplace-relevant variables that should increase or decrease the ambiguity of new products, and examine how these variables affect consumers' susceptibility to others' opinions. Practically, our results offer ways for marketers to understand and manage consumers' evaluations of new products.

Studies 1 and 2 used jellybeans with unidentifiable flavors to represent ambiguous new products. In both studies, undergraduates tasted the jellybeans. Some participants received information about others' opinions (95% of consumers like this flavor of jellybean), while others did not. In addition, in study 1, the timing of when participants received this information was manipulated to occur during or after the jellybean tasting. We predicted that even if participants received information after tasting, this would not be sufficient to eliminate their susceptibility to others' opinions because of ambiguity of the jellybean flavors. In study 2, the unidentifiable jellybean flavor was manipulated, based on pre-testing, such that participants tasted a liked or a disliked jellybean. We predicted that participants would show susceptibility to others' opinions only in the disliked condition, because the desire to reduce ambiguity and increase understanding is greater for negative than for positive experiences (Wong & Weiner 1980).

Replicating prior work, both studies showed that participants “tuned” their opinions to others: receiving positive information about others' opinions increased participants' jellybean evaluations and purchase intentions. The timing manipulation in study 1 did not influence this tuning process: even when participants received

opinion information after tasting the jellybean, their evaluations were still influenced. However, the valence manipulation in study 2 revealed that participants were influenced by others' opinions only when they sampled disliked, rather than liked, jellybeans. This effect was so strong that participants' final, "tuned" evaluations of the disliked jellybean were equivalent to their evaluations of the liked jellybean. Thus, studies 1 and 2 suggest that shared reality effects in the marketplace are fairly robust. In contrast, studies 3 and 4 identify a variable that attenuates these effects and allows consumers to rely on their own evaluations rather than on others'.

Study 3 shows that explaining can decrease consumers' reliance on others' opinions. One might predict that receiving additional information—of any kind—about others' opinions should lead consumers to rely on them even more; however, we find the opposite. Compared to participants who received no information about others' opinions and to participants who received basic information about others' opinions (e.g., 95% of consumers like this muffin), those who received an explanation of others' opinions (e.g., 95% of consumers like this muffin because it is sugar free) did not "tune" their evaluations to others' opinions. We suggest that this is because the explanation decreases ambiguity enough to allow consumers to rely on—and to explain—their own experience with the product, without reference to others.

Study 4 (in progress) will further test the effects of explaining on shared reality by looking at hedonic versus utilitarian products (e.g., a gummy candy vs. a gummy vitamin) crossed with hedonic versus utilitarian explanations (I like this gummy because it's tasty vs. healthy). We predict an explanation by product type interaction (Moore 2012), where receiving hedonic reasons will reduce ambiguity for the hedonic product, and receiving utilitarian reasons will reduce ambiguity for the utilitarian product; this should decrease consumers' reliance on others' opinions and reduce the shared reality effect. We should find a shared reality effect only when others' explanations fail to reduce ambiguity—that is, when consumers receive a hedonic reason for liking a utilitarian product or a utilitarian reason for liking a hedonic product, they should still tune their evaluation to others'.

The current research provides a nuanced picture of when and why consumers are influenced by others' opinions in the marketplace. We find that shared reality motives have a strong impact on consumers' evaluations and intentions to purchase new products—even those that they have direct experience with, and even those that they dislike initially. However, these effects depend on what type of information consumers receive: ironically, receiving more information in the form of an explanation can reduce their reliance on others' opinions.

### **The Curvilinear Relationship between Attitude Certainty and Attitudinal Advocacy**

#### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

From gun control to vaccinations to new product purchases, consumers are constantly advocating their beliefs. On Facebook, for example, friends bombard each other with countless posts commenting on current world events, exciting new products, or the hottest new bar. What drives a person to advocate on behalf of these beliefs? Despite a voluminous literature exploring the antecedents and consequences of persuasion more generally, surprisingly little is known about the determinants of attitudinal advocacy.

One factor that does appear to contribute to advocacy is attitude certainty. Attitude certainty refers to the subjective sense of confidence or conviction with which one holds one's attitude (Rucker,

Tormala, Petty, and Briñol 2014). Certainty traditionally has been viewed as a dimension of attitude strength in that it shapes an attitude's durability and impact. For example, attitudes held with certainty are more resistant to change and more influential over people's choices and behaviors (Tormala and Rucker 2007). Most relevant to the current research, it also has been shown to contribute to advocacy intentions and actual advocacy behavior—people generally advocate more on behalf of their own attitudes and opinions (e.g., share them with others and seek to persuade others to their views) when they hold those attitudes and opinions with certainty (Akhtar, Paunesku, and Tormala 2013; Barden & Petty, 2008; Cheatham and Tormala under review; Visser, Krosnick, & Simmons, 2003).

However, there is also reason to believe that states of low certainty can foster advocacy type behavior. According to Gal and Rucker (2010), when a consumer's confidence about a particular belief is undermined, he or she may feel threatened and engage in compensatory action that includes advocating more aggressively on behalf of the threatened belief. In a similar vein, Rios, Wheeler and Miller (2012) found that inducing people to feel *self*-uncertainty sometimes led them to express minority opinions more freely.

In short, based on past research there is potential controversy surrounding the role of attitude certainty in directing attitudinal advocacy. We propose that this difference might be explained by the fact that past research has examined attitude certainty at different points on the certainty continuum: moderate to high certainty in studies showing a positive relation between certainty and advocacy and low to moderate certainty in studies showing a negative relation. Our central hypothesis is that attitude certainty has a curvilinear relationship with attitudinal advocacy, such that people advocate more when they feel very uncertain or very certain, and advocate less when they are somewhere in between (i.e., moderate certainty). More specifically, we submit that high certainty fosters feelings of efficacy, which have been shown to promote advocacy in past work (Akhtar et al. 2013), whereas low certainty fosters compensatory motives, which lead people to advocate as a means of self-affirmation (Gal and Rucker 2010). We present 3 studies testing these relationships.

Study 1 used a correlational design to provide initial evidence of the proposed curvilinear relationship between certainty and advocacy. Participants were presented with several policy issues and asked about their attitudes, certainty, and advocacy intentions (i.e., their intentions to share their opinion with others and to persuade others to adopt their view). To test our hypothesis we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. First, we observed a main effect of attitude certainty on sharing and persuasion intentions for each issue: the more certain people felt, the more likely they were to advocate. More importantly, we also uncovered a quadratic for both sharing and persuasion intentions, suggesting that both very uncertain and very certain participants expressed higher advocacy intentions than participants with moderate certainty.

Study 2 aimed to experimentally manipulate three levels of certainty to provide evidence of a causal role between certainty and advocacy. Participants were asked to think of an issue they were very uncertain, somewhat certain, or very certain about, followed by the same questions as in study 1 along with an open-ended behavioral question asking them to react to someone who disagreed with them. As predicted, we successfully manipulated attitude certainty at three levels. However, our core interest was in determining whether certainty had a curvilinear relationship with advocacy. Indeed, we continued to find significant evidence for the proposed curvilinear relationship between certainty and advocacy. Moreover, this pattern was replicated in our behavioral measure, such that participants actually advocated more at the low and high ends of certainty than

they did at moderate levels of certainty. Thus, study 2 provided experimental evidence of a causal role between certainty and advocacy.

Finally, in study 3 we aimed to provide evidence for the mechanism driving advocacy at low certainty. Specifically, if uncertain individuals express intentions to advocate because of a compensatory motivation to reduce feelings of threat or discomfort, their intentions to advocate should be attenuated following an affirmation manipulation. To test this hypothesis, we randomly assigned participants to a self-affirmation or non-affirmation control condition. Self-affirmation was manipulated using a procedure adapted from past research by Fein and Spencer (1997) and Martens, Greenberg and Schimel (2006). Participants were then exposed to a novel policy issue about lowering the national drinking age, followed by the same series of questions as in study 2. We found a main (linear) effect of certainty on advocacy intentions, and no main effect of affirmation condition. More importantly, there was also a significant curvilinear effect of certainty on advocacy intentions that was moderated by affirmation condition. The interaction indicated that the curvilinear relationship between certainty and advocacy was obtained in the no affirmation control condition but not in the affirmation condition. When participants were affirmed, the relationship between certainty and advocacy was linear and positive. These results suggest that uncertain individuals' advocacy is compensatory in nature, whereas highly certain individuals' advocacy is not.

In sum, 3 studies provide evidence for the proposed advocacy hypothesis: Attitude certainty has a curvilinear relationship with advocacy such that advocacy is fostered by very high and very low certainty (relative to moderate certainty), albeit through different mechanisms. Implications for understanding and eliciting advocacy in consumer contexts will be discussed.

### **The Power Matching Effect: The Dynamic Interplay of Communicator and Audience Power in Persuasion**

#### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

How does power affect the type of persuasive messages communicators generate and message recipients are responsive to? Building on the proposition that high power increases individuals' tendency to be agentic and low power increases individuals' tendency to be communal (Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky forthcoming; Rucker, Galinsky, and Dubois, 2012), we propose that states of powerlessness and power systematically affect the types of arguments communicators use and recipients value along two foundational dimensions of social judgments: competence and warmth (Cuddy et al. 2008). Where competence refers to perceptions of efficacy, skillfulness and confidence attached to a message, warmth captures the helpfulness, sincerity and friendliness contained in a message. Importantly, agency has been linked to competence and communion has been linked to warmth (see Rucker, Galinsky, and Dubois, 2012).

Because high-power states are associated with agency, we predict that communicators in a high-power state will generate messages related to competence and recipients in a high-power state will be more receptive to messages that emphasize competence. In contrast, because low-power states are associated with agency, we anticipate that communicators in a low-power state will generate messages related to warmth and recipients in a low-power state will be more receptive to messages that emphasize warmth. Taken together, we predict a power-matching effect: high-power communicators will be more persuasive to high-power recipients, whereas low-power communicators will be more persuasive to low-power recipients.

Two initial experiments find support for these effects in both oral and written contexts, with different manipulations of power. A

third experiment demonstrates how this knowledge can be used to craft marketing messages to consumers based on knowledge of consumers' power. Analyses used ANOVAs and t-tests as appropriate.

#### **Experiment 1: Testing the dynamic interplay**

Participants were assigned to the role of boss (high power) or employee (low power; Lammers et al. 2008) for a future task in the session. Their position was unknown to other participants. Next, in a different task, participants took part in a persuasion game. Participants were given the name of a remote, fictional sounding city (e.g., Lalibela) and were instructed to craft a message aimed at convincing others that this city was in a particular location of their choice (e.g., Uruguay). Participants took turns to orally convince others, and alternated in the communicator and recipient roles. As recipients, participants were asked the extent to which they believed the city was in the location the speaker talked about.

High-power communicators were overall preferred to those generated by low-power communicators. Of central importance to the power matching hypothesis, high-power recipients found messages generated by high-power communicators to be significantly more persuasive than those generated by low-power communicators, while low-power recipients found messages generated by low-power communicators more persuasive than those generated by high-power communicators.

#### **Experiment 2: Testing the underlying mechanism hypothesis**

Experiment 2 tested whether differences in warmth and competence explained the dynamic interplay between communicators' and recipients' power. In addition, a written context, as opposed to an oral context, was used. Participants were assigned to a 3(communicators' power: baseline, low, high)  $\times$  3(recipients' power: baseline, low, high) between participant design. Both communicators' and recipients' power was manipulated through an episodic recall task where they described a time they lacked power (low-power condition), possessed power (high-power condition), or did not write anything (baseline condition, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003). Communicators wrote a persuasive message aimed at promoting their university at a local high school. These messages were then randomly presented to recipients whose task was to judge the message on three dimensions: persuasiveness; perceived competence of the message; and perceived warmth of the message.

Results replicated experiment 1: high-power recipients judged the messages generated by high-power communicators as more persuasive than those generated by low-power and baseline communicators. In contrast, low-power recipients judged the messages generated by low-power communicators as more persuasive than those generated by high-power and baseline communicators. Among baseline recipients, there was no effect of power on persuasion. Further, mediation analyses found that among high-power recipients competence but not warmth mediated the effect of communicator's power on persuasiveness. In contrast, among low-power recipients warmth but not competence mediated the effect of communicators' power on persuasiveness. Thus, experiment 2 replicated experiment 1 and introduced evidence for the mediating process.

#### **Experiment 3: Using Knowledge of Warmth and Competence to Craft Messages to Consumers**

Based on experiments 1 and 2, experiment 3 examined how a communicator could craft their own messages to resonate with recipient power. That is, rather than vary communicator power, we

examine how a communicator could select content in their own message to persuade an audience.

Participants were exposed to an ad for a charity project. The ad was similar across conditions, with one exception: The project was supported by a “.org” in the warm condition, and by a “.com” in the competent condition. This manipulation has been used successfully to manipulate warmth and competence, respectively (Aaker et al. 2010). To measure power, we asked whether participants considered themselves more of a boss (high-power) or an employee (low-power) at work. The dependent variable was the amount of time in minutes they would spend to help with the project.

Results revealed a significant interaction, such that individuals who self-reported themselves as bosses (i.e., high-power) were willing to donate more time when the ad emphasized competence (i.e., .com) than when it emphasized warmth (i.e., .org). In contrast, individuals who self-reported themselves as employees (i.e., low-power) were significantly more willing to donate more time when the ad emphasized warmth than when it emphasized competence. In addition, differences in perceptions of warmth and competence in the charitable organization mediated low- and high-power individuals' willingness to donate time. This experiment demonstrates how messages can be effectively crafted based on knowledge of recipients' power.

### Conclusion and Contributions

Altogether, these experiments offer a framework for understanding how power affects the communication and reception of persuasive messages. The findings have important theoretical implications for understanding interpersonal communication and persuasion as they provide the first evidence of the dynamic interplay between communicators' and recipients' power.

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