Bragging Through an Intermediary

Irene Scopelliti, City University of London, UK
Joachim Vosgerau, Bocconi University, Italy
George Loewenstein, Carnegie Mellon University, USA

The use of an intermediary to convey positive information about a target person is received more favorably and is more effective than direct self-promotion by the target person. These effects persist irrespective of whether the intermediary is motivated by self-interest. However, intermediation may carry image costs for the intermediary.

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It’s A Brave New World -

The Consequences of Consumers’ Self-Disclosure in Online Settings

Chairs: Francesca Valsesia, University of Southern California, USA
Kristin Diehl, University of Southern California, USA

Paper #1: See What I Did or See What I Have: Impression Management Using Experiences Versus Material Goods
Francesca Valsesia, University of Southern California, USA
Kristin Diehl, University of Southern California, USA

Paper #2: Temporary Sharing, Enduring Impressions: Self-Presentation in the Digital Age
Roland Ruppell, Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland
Reto Hofstetter, Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland
Leslie K. John, Harvard University, USA

Paper #3: Bragging through an Intermediary
Irene Scopelliti, City University London, UK
Joachim Vosgerau, Bocconi University, Italy
George Loewenstein, Carnegie Mellon University, USA

Paper #4: How Audience Engagement (in the Form of Likes vs. Comments) on Social Media Posts Influences Subsequent Self-Disclosure
Yuheng Hu, University of Illinois at Chicago, USA
David Gal, University of Illinois at Chicago, USA

SESSION OVERVIEW

People strategically disclose information about themselves as a mean of managing the impressions they make on others (Schlenker 1980, Berger 2014). The advent of social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat provided individuals not just with novel platforms but also novel practices to self-present easily and widely, using a range of topics and activities (e.g. purchases, trips, political opinions, etc.). Yet, many questions remain about the antecedents and consequences of these acts of self-disclosure. Connecting to well-established frameworks, this session explores the roles played by message, medium, senders and recipients in online self-presentation. Specifically, which type of personal information do consumers choose for self-presentation and which influences others’ impressions the most? Which characteristics of the medium used for self-presentation play a significant role? For instance, does it matter whether the medium allows temporary (vs. permanent) sharing or whether the information is shared directly by the consumer or through an intermediary? Finally, how does feedback received to an act of self-disclosure influence subsequent self-disclosure decisions? The papers in this session address this set of related questions, with particular focus on information shared through social media platforms.

Valsesia and Diehl compare sharing information about one’s material versus experiential purchases. They show that consumers strategically choose to share their experiential purchases when they want to make a favorable impression. This is a successful self-presentation strategy as those sharing experiential purchases are better liked, particularly in situations where individuals repeatedly share self-relevant content over time, as in the case of social media.

The next two papers address the role of the medium through which self-presentation occurs. Ruppel, Hofstetter and John ask whether temporary sharing using social media such as Snapchat influences what consumers choose to share and how it is perceived. They find temporary sharing causes people to take greater risks in their disclosures. This is driven by a dampening of privacy concerns but can have negative consequences, as impressions based on discreet disclosures persist beyond the disclosure’s temporary lifespan.

Scopelliti, Vosgerau and Loewenstein compare the effect of direct self-promotion to using an intermediary who delivers promotional content about a target individual. They show that promotional information elicits more positive and less negative emotions in recipients when disclosed by an intermediary (e.g. a friend, an agent) rather than oneself. Yet, while this practice enhances target perceptions it carries image costs for the intermediary.

Importantly, self-disclosure oftentimes involves feedback from others, which in social media takes the form of likes and comments. Hu and Gal examine how this feedback influences subsequent self-disclosure decisions. They find that the receipt of comments (vs. likes), particularly from distant others, reduces subsequent self-disclosure because comments are more likely perceived as a form of unwanted intimacy.

Taken together, these papers shed light on drivers and consequences of consumers’ online self-presentation. All are at an advanced stage of completion with multiple studies completed. We expect this session to generate significant interest among researchers studying impression management, social influence and social judgment, as well as social media and word-of-mouth more broadly.

See What I Did or See What I Have: Impression Management Using Experiences Versus Material Goods

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

That people use material purchases to manage impressions is well established (e.g. Han et al 2010, Bellezza et al 2014, Warren & Campbell 2014, Giskevicius et al 2010). Experiential purchases, however, have not been examined as impression management tools, even though they play an important role in people’s lives (e.g. Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). Prior work has not considered whether experiences can be used to manage impressions, likely because “on average, possessions are a more visible and more persistent signal” (Carter & Gilovich 2012 p. 1314).

However, there do exist various, common ways of making experiential purchases more observable and less ephemeral. For example, one may complement a fleeting, unobservable experiential purchase with a visible, lasting material purchase (e.g. buying a t-shirt at a concert and wearing it afterwards e.g. Goodman, Malkoc, Stephen¬son 2016). Further, with the advent of social media, making one’s experiential purchases visible by posting about them online has become easy and prevalent (e.g. Barasch, Zauberman, and Diehl 2016).

Our research investigates the use of experiential purchases for impression management purposes. We show that consumers strategically use their experiential purchases to manage others’ impressions of them because they consider experiential purchases to be better signals than material purchases. Moreover, we show that this is a successful strategy as those signaling with experiential purchases are indeed better liked compared to those using material purchases.

Four studies tackle our research goals. Study 1 is a field study testing the proposition that individuals trying to manage others’ impressions favor using experiential over material purchases. During the first day of class, students were asked to write about a purchase that was important to them on a “Get to Know You” card. We varied
between sections whether they expected to read out their answers in front of the class (public) or not (private). Overall, students mentioned purchases that were more experiential than material in nature ($M=1.57$, $SD=2.92$, 95% $CI$ [2.63, 3.27], $t(166)=6.98$, $p<.001$). Importantly, though, and in line with our predictions, purchases in the public condition ($M_{public}=2.02$, $SD=2.82$, 95% $CI$ [1.42, 2.63]) were significantly more experiential than those in the private condition ($M_{private}=1.11$, $SD=2.96$, 95% $CI$ [0.46, 1.76], $F(1,165)=4.19$, $p=.042$, $\omega^2 = .019$), presumably because the desire to make a favorable impression was particularly salient.

Study 2 provides further evidence for people favoring experiential purchases when trying to generate favorable impressions. We asked 112 mTurkers to write about a material or experiential purchase they had made. When asked whether they had actually posted about this purchase on social media, we find that they were more likely to have posted about their experiential rather than material purchase (56.9% vs. 20.4%, $X^2=15.64$, $p<.001$), in line with our predictions. Next, they wrote a Facebook post about their purchase and rated the impressions they expected post readers would form of them using a 4-item scale ($\alpha=.85$). Respondents expected to generate more favorable impressions if they posted about their experiential purchases ($M_{exp}=6.75$ vs. $M_{mat}=6.00$, $F(1,110)=10.31$, $p=.002$). Moreover, a mediation analysis with 2,000 bootstrap samples (Hayes 2013) showed expected impressions mediate the effect of purchase type on respondents’ real-life decision of whether or not to actually post something about the purchase on social media (indirect=$0.26$, 95% $CI$=[0.036, 0.719]).

Study 2 also investigated how experiential purchases are actually perceived. A separate group of 148 mTurkers evaluated the posts written in the first part of the study on the same 4-item impressions scale ($\alpha=.90$). We combined the data of “writers” and “readers” and regressed impressions on the two manipulated variables: purchase type (1=experiential, -1=material), and evaluation (1=predicted, -1=actual). We only found an effect of purchase type ($B=0.410$, $t(3.39, p=.001)$, suggesting that individuals are correct in expecting that others form better impressions of them based on experiential purchases.

Studies 3 and 4 tackle the questions of how repeated signals are chosen and received. Study 3 followed a 2 (purchase: experiential vs. material) x 2 (number of posts: 1 vs. 4) between-subjects design and examined how reading one versus four Facebook posts about either experiential or material purchases affects impressions. MTurkers (N = 703) reported forming more positive impressions when either experiential or material purchases affects impressions. Moreover, it adds to the literature on experiential versus material purchases by investigating how these different purchases affect others, rather than the purchaser herself. We expect these topics to be of interest to a wide range of researchers and expect it to generate interesting discussions and avenues for future research.

### Temporary Sharing, Enduring Impressions: Self-Presentation in the Digital Age

#### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the advent of social media, the impressions people make on others are based increasingly on their digital disclosures. Yet such disclosures are forever catalogued in the cloud, and can thus come back to haunt (Rosen, 2010).

New technologies place expiration dates on online disclosures in order to balance the desire for privacy with the desire to disclose. Examples include Snapchat, with more than 150 million active users daily, which is now also the most popular social network amongst American young adults (Statista, 2017). From a narrow perspective, these technologies would seem to be a panacea. After all, content that no longer exists cannot come back to haunt.

Or can it? Prior research has shown that first impressions are sticky (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992). Moreover, observers may overattribute sharing to the (bad) judgment of the sharer, and not adequately acknowledge the ephemerality of the sharing platform. Social psychologists have documented that people tend to overattribute others’ behavior to enduring personality characteristics, failing to account for situational influences (Jones & Harris, 1967). We thus argue that that people’s impressions of sharers are driven by the content of the photo, and not by sharers’ choice of sharing medium.

This issue is potentially compounded because the promise of ephemerality may increase disclosure. Prior research points to this possibility. For one, in honoring the desire for privacy, it could reassure privacy concerns, causing people to “let their guard down,” (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999), and in turn increase disclosure (Brandimarte, Acquisti, & Loewenstein, 2013). Therefore, we predict that temporary sharing causes people to take greater risks in their disclosures relative to more permanent forms of sharing and that this effect is driven by a dampening of privacy concerns. We tested our predictions in five experiments manipulating whether people shared content only temporarily or permanently.

In Experiment 1, we asked people (N = 296) in a public space on a Swiss university campus to take and share a selfie on a public display application and on Facebook either only temporarily or permanently.

**People in the temporary condition were 1.22 times more likely to take and share a selfie relative to those in the permanent condition (70.00% versus 57.56%; $\chi^2(1) = 4.85$, $p < .05$). Moreover, participants in the temporary condition were 3.82 times more likely to take uninhibited selfies relative to the permanent condition ($M_{temp} = 46.67\%$ vs. $M_{perm} = 12.23\%$; $\chi^2(1) = 40.66$, $p < .01$). Finally, asking observers to rate the sharers and their photos indicated that those in the temporary condition were perceived as having worse judgment**
than those in the permanent condition (M_{temporary} = 3.00 vs. M_{permanent} = 3.88; F(1, 184) = 34.86, p < .01).

We replicate this pattern of results in Experiment 2 in the lab: participants (N = 191), were asked to take and share a selfie via their webcams either permanently, temporarily or without any information regarding the lifespan of their sharing (baseline).

Sharers in the temporary condition were 1.77 times more likely to depict disinhibition relative to baseline (M_{temporary} = 48.28% vs. M_{baseline} = 27.27%; $\chi^2(1) = 5.84, p < .05$); and 1.70 times more likely relative to the permanent condition (M_{permanent} = 28.36%, $\chi^2(1) = 5.26, p < .05$). Moreover, temporary sharers were viewed as having worse judgment relative to sharers from both the baseline (M_{temporary} = 3.72 vs. M_{baseline} = 4.31; t(99) = 2.57, p < .01) and permanent (M_{temporary} = 3.72 vs. M_{permanent} = 4.26; t(99) = 2.32, p < .01) conditions.

In Experiment 3 (N = 201) we asked participants to state how "goofy" (from 1-5) of a selfie they would share on a temporary (Snapchat) or a permanent sharing medium (iMessage) and measured their privacy concerns as well as predictions of the observers' attributions of their own sharing. Again, the temporary sharing medium induced uninhibitedness (M_{temporary} = 3.19, SD = 1.26 vs. M_{baseline} = 2.17, t(99) = 6.02, p < .01). Moreover, mediation analysis showed support for a mediating effect of a reduction in privacy concerns (Sobel test statistic = 2.35, p < .05), and participants were more likely to think that observers would attribute their disclosure choices to the platform warranting it in the temporary condition (M_{temporary} = 3.26, SD = 1.77; M_{permanent} = 2.62, t(99) = 2.73, p < .01).

In Experiment 4, we assessed the validity of this belief by testing whether observers temper their judgment of sharers based on the medium on which the selfies are shared. Each participant (N = 428) was shown either an uninhibited versus conventional selfie and; told that the subject had sent it on either a temporary medium (Snapchat) or a permanent medium (iMessage); and rated the extent to which the subject had good judgment.

Participants deemed people who appeared uninhibited as having worse judgment relative to those not appearing uninhibited (M_{Conventional} = 5.11 vs. M_{Uninhibited} = 3.58; F(1, 424) = 104.13, p < .01). These judgments were not tempered by sharing medium (F(1, 424) = .03, p = .87).

Experiment 5 tested whether observers' assessments of sharers' judgment may be tempered by personal experience with temporary sharing media. Participants (N = 396) were again shown either an uninhibited or conventional selfie and told that it had been shared on a temporary medium, before they rated the extent to which the target had good judgment. Prior to the rating task, half of participants were asked to upload and temporarily share a selfie of their own.

Again, participants deemed sharers who appeared uninhibited as having worse judgment relative to those not appearing uninhibited (M_{Conventional} = 5.35 vs. M_{Uninhibited} = 4.00; F(1, 392) = 79.00, p < .01). These judgments were not tempered by experience with temporary sharing (F(1, 392) = .80, p = .37).

In sum, we document psychological drivers behind the capacity for temporary sharing to induce disclosure: the dampening of privacy concerns and the false belief that others will factor the ephemeral nature of their medium into their judgments. Temporary sharing may bring back forgetting, but not without introducing new self-presentation challenges.

Bragging through an Intermediary

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Self-promotion is a useful strategy to present a favorable image of themselves to others (Jones & Pittman, 1982), adopted in situations where one needs to make her quality known to others, or is competing against others (Rudman, 1998). Self-promotion, however, can backfire and it reduces self-promoters' likeability when it is perceived as braggading (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Scopelliti, Loewenstein, & Vosgerau, 2015), suggesting the existence of a trade-off between conveying positive information about oneself and not being perceived as a braggart and as such undermining one's likeability. One possible strategy to address this trade-off would be to have another person disclose positive information on one's behalf. For example, Pfeffer, Fong, Cialdini, & Portnoy (2006) showed that job candidates and authors were perceived as more likeable when promoted by agents than when they were promoting themselves. Similar to the use of intermediaries to reduce perceived responsibility for morally questionable actions (cfr. Hamann, Loewenstein, & Weber, 2010), using an intermediary to convey positive descriptions may protect the individual being promoted from the adverse consequences of self-promotion (Inman, McDonald, & Ruch, 2004).

We argue that i) the use of an intermediary to convey positive information about a target person will elicit more positive and less negative emotions in recipients than direct self-promotion; ii) inter-mediation effectively enhances perceptions of the target person on the qualities being disclosed; iii) this effect persists irrespective of whether the intermediary is motivated by self-interest; iv) inter-mediation may damage the intermediary, in particular when the person praised has a higher status. We test these predictions in four experiments.

In Study 1, participants (N = 190) imagined logging into their Facebook account and reading a post about the volunteering activities in a developing country of one of their contacts. In the direct self-promotion condition, the post was in first person and appeared as being written by the protagonist. In the intermediary condition, a different person wrote the post and the protagonist was mentioned (tagged) in the post. Afterwards, participants indicated to what extent reading the post would make them experience positive and negative feelings, and a series of discrete emotions (jealous, upset, happy, proud, annoyed, angry, inferior, and envious) towards the protagonist. Direct self-promotion induced less positive and more negative emotions, and made readers feel more upset at, less happy for, less proud of, more annoyed by, and angrier at the protagonist (ps < .001) than the same information reported through an intermediary. No significant differences emerged for the three other emotions, i.e., envy, jealousy, and feelings of inferiority (ps > .33).

In Study 2, participants (N = 133) were assigned to one of two conditions (as in Study 1), reported their emotional reactions, and rated the target person and themselves (order counterbalanced) on the same 8 positive traits (kind, brave, special, generous, honest, compassionate, hardworking, and selfless). Participants evaluated the target person slightly more favorably than they rated themselves in the direct self-promotion condition (p = .043), but the effect was amplified in the intermediary condition (p < .001), suggesting that the act of self-promoting reduced the positive impact of the information conveyed.

In Study 3 we examined whether the observed effects persist even when the intermediary is motivated by self-interest by adding two conditions to Study 1. In these conditions participants were informed that the intermediary had a romantic interest or a professional interest (i.e., hoping to get a job at the target person's company) towards the target person, respectively. Participants (N = 199) read the post, reported their emotions, and rated the target person on a set of positive traits related to the content of the message (kind, brave, special, generous, compassionate, and selfless). Direct self-promotion induced less positive and more negative emotions than the same in-
formation reported through an intermediary (ps < .001), irrespective of the intermediary’s self-interest. No differences emerged between the three intermediary conditions. The same pattern of results was observed on five of the six positive traits (all ps < .05), and marginally on one trait, special (p = .08).

In Study 4, participants (N = 300) read the post corresponding to one of the three intermediary conditions from Study 3 and reported their impressions of either the intermediary or of the target person (negative/positive; favorable/unfavorable; not highly at all/very highly regarded). Impressions of the intermediary were less favorable than impressions of the target person, marginally in the condition of no self-interest (p = .07), but significantly so in the two self-interest conditions (ps < .003).

In Study 5, participants (N = 601) read a scenario in which an intermediary publicly praised either a peer, or someone in a higher status position, or someone in a lower status position. Participants then reported their impressions of either the intermediary or of the target person as in Study 4. Impressions of the intermediary were less favorable than impressions of the target person (p < .001). Moreover, whereas impressions of the intermediary were lowest when the person publicly praised had a higher status position compared to the other two conditions (p < .001), impressions of the target person did not change across the three conditions (p = .81).

These studies show that disclosing the same positive information through an intermediary (vs. by direct self-promotion) elicits more positive and less negative emotions in recipients (Study 1), and increases the perceived superiority of the person being promoted on the traits being disclosed (Study 2), irrespective of the disclosure of self-interest by the intermediary (Study 3). However, intermediaries do not make as good an impression as the targets of their public praises, but, interestingly, more negative impressions of the intermediary are not reflected in more negative impressions of the targets they praise (Studies 4 and 5). In summary, being publicly praised by an intermediary seems to be beneficial for the target person, but it may carry hidden image costs for the intermediary.

How Audience Engagement (in the Form of Likes vs. Comments) on Social Media Posts Influences Subsequent Self-Disclosure

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Audience engagement is a prominent feature of social media. We examine how different forms of audience engagement, namely likes and comments, influence the degree to which consumers disclose private information about themselves on social media.

Audience engagement with social media posts can formally be categorized into two main forms: single-click engagement (e.g., “likes”) and composed content (e.g., “comments”). Prior research suggests that both forms tend to be perceived positively as forms of social approval (Burke & Kraut, 2013; Scissors, Burke, & Wen-grovitz, 2016), and hence both might be expected to be positively reinforcing.

However, we propose that likes and comments might have different implications for the construal of intimacy with downstream consequences for self-disclosure. In particular, we posit that comments are likely to be perceived as reflecting a greater degree of intimacy than likes. The reason is that comments, because they must be read rather than automatically perceived, are likely to impose to a greater degree on the attention and consciousness of the recipient. Given that the ability to impose oneself on another is a key element of social closeness (Sharabany 1994), comments can be viewed as the social media equivalent of encroaching on one’s personal space. As a result, when comments are received from socially distant others, an intimacy violation can arise, thereby reducing the propensity to self-disclose.

We first examined our theorizing in a series of experiments. In a first study, participants were randomly assigned to either a “like” or “comment” condition in a study employing a single-factor between-subject design. Participants were asked to imagine that someone had posted a picture of themselves having fun with friends on a social media site such as Facebook or Instagram. Those in the “like” condition were asked to imagine that someone “liked” the photo and those in the “comment” condition were asked to imagine that someone posted a positive comment on the photo indicating that they liked the photo. Participants then evaluated how close the person that liked/ commented on the photo was to the poster on a 7 point scale from “not at all” to “very.” Participants rated the poster and the person that engaged with the post closer in the comment condition than in the like condition supporting the idea that there is a greater construal of intimacy associated with comments than with likes.

A second experiment assigned participants to either a like or comment condition in a single-factor between-subject design. Participants were asked to imagine that they had posted a picture of themselves having fun with friends on a social media site. Participants in like condition were asked to imagine that someone liked their post and those in the comment condition were asked to imagine that someone they did not know commented on their post, “Love this pic! You look like are having so much fun!” Participants then reported their perceived level of discomfort (which served as an operationalization of an intimacy violation) and, for the dependent variable, rated how cautious they would be in subsequently disclosing personal information. Consistent with the idea that comments received from individuals with which one has weak times can be perceived as an intimacy violation, individuals reported greater discomfort after the receipt of comments than after the receipt of likes and this mediated the greater caution in disclosing personal information after receiving comments than after receiving likes.

Experiment 3 identified social distance as a moderator of the effect documented in Experiment 2, namely the greater discomfort associated with the receipt of comments (vs. likes) applied to socially distant others but not to socially close others. Experiment 4 provided evidence for our process account, showing that the degree of perceived intimacy violation evoked by comments was related to the degree to which the comment demanded the attention of the recipient. In particular, participants were asked to imagine they posted a picture of themselves having fun with family and that a commenter wrote, depending on condition, either “Looks fun” or “Looks fun! Was it?” The latter was perceived to demand greater attention and was perceived as a greater intimacy violation than the former when comments were received from strangers, but not when received from friends.

We continued our investigation through analysis of 187 million photos posted by almost 1 million users of the social media platform Instagram. We used the decision to disclose one’s photo location as a proxy for self-disclosure more broadly. We found that the receipt of likes on a photo was associated with increased subsequent disclosure whereas the receipt of comments on a photo was associated with decreased subsequent disclosure. There was also an interaction effect, such that the effect of both likes and comments was enhanced when the location of the prior photo was disclosed (vs. not). These findings are consistent with the idea that likes are positively reinforcing whereas comments are negatively reinforcing of self-disclosure behavior.
This research thus shows that the implications of user engagement on social media arise not merely from the valence or content of the engagement but through the construal of intimacy implied through the behavior. We discuss practical implications for the design of social media platforms.

REFERENCES