The Impact of Feedback on Word of Mouth

by

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on how consumers are impacted by receiving feedback on word of mouth recommendations. In particular, I examine what occurs when a consumer recommends an experience to another person, and this other person has the experience and returns to say that they did or did not like it. I find that the valence of this feedback impacts subsequent word of mouth, and that impact in turn depends on whether the recommender is self-focused or other-focused when making their recommendation. When recommenders make other-focused recommendations, negative (versus positive) feedback acts as a threat that causes them to dissociate from the experience, decreasing their subsequent recommendation intentions. However, when recommenders make self-focused recommendations, this buffers them against the threat, and so they do not decrease their subsequent recommendation intentions after negative feedback.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Virginia Weber. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “RECONSUMPTION EXPERIENCES”, No. Pro00052144, October 22, 2014.

This thesis is an original work by Virginia Weber. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

DEDICATION

For my mother, who taught me the value of education and perseverance. And for her mother, who taught her first.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Consumers are constantly telling others about their experiences—they listen to new songs and tell their friends to look up the artist, they see movies and gush about how good they were to others. In recommending these experiences, consumers are engaging in word of mouth (WOM), a ubiquitous and essential consumption behavior in modern society (Berger 2014). Although there is a wealth of research on WOM and recommendations, the bulk of this work examines what drives WOM (Berger and Milkman 2012; Berger and Iyengar 2013; Berger and Schwartz 2011; Cheema and Kaikati 2010) or how a recipient responds to it (Hamilton, Vohs, and McGill 2014; Packard, Gershoff, and Wooten 2016; He and Bond 2015), with comparatively less work examining how WOM impacts the recommender (sf. Moore 2012; Barasch and Berger 2014). The present research takes a unique perspective by examining the impact of feedback on WOM. In particular, I explore what happens when a consumer recommends a song or a movie to another consumer, and the recipient follows the recommendation, has the experience, and then gives the recommender feedback on what they thought of it. In doing so, the current work provides an initial understanding of whether, how, and why receiving feedback on WOM recommendations might influence the recommender.

Across four studies, this research examines the impact of feedback on recommendations. I study recommendations about positive experiences, as experiences serve to define the self (Carter and Gilovich 2012). I focus on feedback valence—that is, whether the WOM recipient liked or disliked the recommendation. While the literature suggests that receiving positive feedback will result in the recommender engaging in subsequent WOM (Baumeister et al. 2001; Ilgen Fisher, and Taylor 1979; Skinner 1953), the impact of negative feedback is unclear. In fact,

many responses are possible: the recommender may not respond to this feedback at all, may bolster their connection to the experience and recommend it more, or may distance themselves from the experience and recommend it less. I draw from research on feedback valence (Baumeister et al. 2001; Bloom and Hautaluoma 1987; Ilgen et al. 1979) and on psychological threats (Han, Duhachek, and Rucker 2015; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010) to motivate my predictions on how consumers will respond to negative feedback on their recommendations.

To preview, I predict that receiving negative (versus positive) feedback on a recommendation will decrease consumers' subsequent WOM for their experience. However, I predict that this will be moderated by whether consumers make recommendations in line with their own preferences—for example, telling someone else to watch a movie because it is their own favorite—or in line with their recipient's preferences—for example, having someone listen to a given song because they believe this person will enjoy it. In particular, consumers will only decrease their subsequent WOM after negative feedback if they take their recipient's preferences into account when making their recommendations (i.e., if they are other-focused; Barasch and Berger 2014). Under these conditions, the negative feedback becomes threatening to the recommender, and so they will cope by dissociating from the experience they recommended (White, Argo, and Sengupta 2012). In contrast, I predict that when the recommender is self-focused (i.e., makes recommendations based solely on their own preferences), the impact of negative feedback on subsequent WOM will be attenuated (i.e., the consumer will continue to recommend the experience). This is because self-focus acts as a protective shield to the self, buffering consumers against negative feedback on their recommendations. I test my predictions by manipulating feedback valence and recommendation focus in my studies.

Contributions

This work makes several important theoretical contributions to the literature. First and foremost, I contribute to research on WOM. In particular, I diverge from prior work in this area (e.g., Berger and Milkman 2012; Berger and Iyengar 2013; Berger and Schwartz 2011; Cheema and Kaikati 2010; Hamilton et al. 2014; Packard, et al. 2016; He and Bond 2015) to explore the effect of WOM on the recommender themselves. Although WOM is inherently a social situation in which a recommender shares with (at least) one other person, our understanding of this conversational element of WOM is limited (Moore and McFerran 2017). As such, I introduce the notion of feedback to the existing literature on WOM, filling a gap in this field of work. Given the importance of feedback in altering behavior (e.g., Baumeister et al. 2001; Ham and Midden 2010; Skinner 1953), this factor is important to investigate in WOM settings.

Second, I bridge the extant research on WOM (Barasch and Berger 2014; Berger 2015; Moore 2012) with that on threat (Cutright 2012; Han et al. 2015; Kim and Rucker 2012; Rucker and Galinsky 2008; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010; White and Argo 2009; White et al. 2012). In particular, I demonstrate that consumers can be threatened by feedback on their WOM, and that this has implications for their subsequent recommendation behaviour. As such, I provide important theoretical insights into how consumers cope with threat in WOM contexts.

Third, I contribute to research on threat by uncovering a novel factor that buffers consumers against threat: self-focus. That is, I find that only consumers who are other-focused when making their recommendation decrease their subsequent WOM after negative (versus positive) feedback, whereas consumers who are self-focused when making their recommendations are buffered against this feedback and continue to recommend the experience. In doing so, I contribute to the threat literature by identifying a situational factor (i.e.,

recommendation focus) that can act as a protective shield to the self (Kim and Rucker 2012; Townsend and Sood 2012). This is important in that it provides a new way to look at threat and how consumers can protect themselves against it.

Finally, this work has important practical implications. If firms aim to maximize WOM, ensuring that consumers do not stop spreading WOM after a single recommendation is important. My research finds that firms should encourage consumers to be self-focused in the recommendations they make. Doing so benefits not only marketing practitioners, but also consumers, who may not wish to be threatened by feedback on their recommendations.

In the next section, I review the relevant literature on WOM, feedback valence, threat, and recommendation focus. Following this, I integrate these theories and outline my formal hypotheses. I then present a research overview of the various experiments I conduct and discuss potential alternate explanations for the effects, each of which I will rule out with this work. Finally, I report four experiments that test my predictions and conclude by discussing the implications of this work, as well as potential avenues for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Word of Mouth

WOM occurs anytime a consumer talks about a brand, purchase, or experience (Godes et al. 2005). It is an essential element to marketing and a key driver of purchase behavior (Bughin, Doogan, and Vetvik 2010; see also: Berger 2014); indeed, 84% of consumers trust recommendations from others (Nielsen 2013). Given this, it is not surprising that companies encourage their consumers to engage in positive WOM, or that the trade press is calling WOM

"the most important social media" (Whitler 2014). Beyond the practical side, a wealth of research has gone into studying WOM. To date, the majority of this work examines what type of content is shared, as well as why, where, and to whom consumers make their recommendations (Barasch and Berger 2014; Berger and Milkman 2012; Berger and Iyengar 2013; Berger and Schwartz 2011). For instance, Berger and Milkman (2012) find that consumers tend to share things that evoke 'activating' emotions such as awe and anger, and avoid sharing content associated with low-arousal or 'de-activating' emotions such as sadness. Similarly, there is also a great deal of research on how consumers evaluate the WOM they receive from others (Hamilton et al. 2014; He and Bond 2015; Packard et al. 2016). For instance, Hamilton and his colleagues (2016) find that when consumers encounter negative reviews that include "dispreferred markers" (e.g., "don't get me wrong, but…")—that is, a preemptive conversational hedge that indicates the reader is about to encounter negative information—they evaluate the review writer as being more likeable and credible than if the writer did not include this marker.

In contrast, less research has explored how engaging in WOM impacts the person who does the recommending. Two important exceptions include work by Moore (2012) and by Barasch and Berger (2014). Moore (2012) studies how the content of the recommender's WOM can impact their own subsequent WOM intentions. In particular, she finds that using explaining language (e.g., "because") to describe hedonic experiences increases consumers' understanding of these experiences. With respect to positive hedonic experiences, this increased understanding decreases their likelihood of continuing to engage in WOM. Second, Barasch and Berger (2014) explore how characteristics related to the WOM recipient (i.e., audience size) influence what consumers recommend. Specifically, they find that consumers who recommend to a single individual become more other-focused, and thus recommend things that will be useful to this

person. Conversely, those who recommend to a larger (broad) audience become more self-focused, and thus recommend things that help fulfill self-enhancement motives.

Notably, these articles examine how WOM impacts the recommender, examining the content within WOM (Moore 2012) and factors relating to the audience (Barasch and Berger 2014) in isolation. However, there is some work that suggests that WOM evolves as a conversation over time, and that social others can influence a recommender's subsequent WOM behaviour. For instance, Moe and Schweidel (2012) find that in an online review context, previously-posted reviews influence the subsequent posting behaviour of other users, demonstrating a dynamic evolution of the social impact in WOM contexts. Similarly, Moore and McFerran (2017) find that in online forums, users mimic the language and word use of other users who are personally similar to them or similar in terms of status, and this has implications for their subsequent posting behaviour. However, the current literature on WOM is agnostic as to how recommender characteristics (such as recommendation focus) will interact with the content of the WOM conversation (such as a feedback valence) in predicting subsequent WOM behaviour. As such, I turn to the literature on feedback valence to provide insight into how and why feedback will influence subsequent WOM.

Feedback Valence

At its broadest level, feedback is any reaction to a stimulus. As such, feedback comes in a variety of forms, and individuals encounter feedback in all aspects of their life. Feedback is often used as a means for reinforcing or punishing behaviour, so as to shape behaviour over time (Skinner 1953). Feedback can thus be positive or negative, and the valence of the feedback has implications for how an individual will respond to it (Baumeister et al. 2001; Ilgen et al. 1979;

Skinner 1953; Wheeler and Fellows 2008). In particular, while positive feedback is reinforcing (Skinner 1953), negative feedback implies a need for correction (Ilgen et al. 1979) and causes individuals to change their behaviour in line with the feedback (Baumeister et al. 2001; Bloom and Hautaluoma 1987). Though positive feedback is generally more accepted than negative (Ilgen et al. 1979), negative feedback is more potent in altering behaviour (Baumeister et al. 2001).

Importantly, individuals learn from the feedback of others (Ilgen et al. 1979; Greller and Herold 1975) and social contexts can strengthen the efficacy of feedback on learning (Ham and Midden 2010). In this vein, WOM settings are no different from other learning contexts. Consumers can make a recommendation to others and receive feedback on it in the form of learning whether the other person liked or disliked the recommendation. As such, feedback valence is manifested in whether the WOM recipient liked or disliked the recommendation. To the extent that consumers accept positive feedback (Ilgen et al. 1979) and it reinforces behaviour (Skinner 1953), positive feedback on WOM is likely to maintain subsequent WOM intentions. It is unlikely to augment intentions, given that individuals learn slower with positive than negative feedback, and given that positive feedback does not have as strong an impact on subsequent behaviour as negative feedback (Baumeister et al. 2001). On the other hand, negative feedback is aversive (Ilgen et al. 1979) and thus likely to constitute a threat to consumers (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010). To understand the threatening impact of negative feedback, I next discuss research on threat.

Threat

Individuals experience a diverse array of psychological threats—that is, the experience of one's favorable self-views being called into question (Baumeister, Smart, and Boden 1996; Campbell and Sedikides 1999)—and these threats can be injurious to their self-concept. Psychological threats are felt as an aversive discrepancy ("between one's current state and an end state"; Han et al. 2015, p. 532) and can span a variety of domains including threats to one's intellect (Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2009), social group (White and Argo 2009; White et al. 2012), sense of control (Cutright 2012) and power (Rucker and Galinsky 2008), and mortality (Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman 2005; Han et al. 2015). For example, informing university students that their school scored low on dimensions important to that student is sufficient to threaten that student's group identity (Dietz-Uhler 1999). There are also broad self-threats which can arise through simply telling an individual that they have scored lower than others on a given task, threatening their global sense of self (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010).

Because feeling threatened is aversive, and consumers are motivated to maintain a positive sense of self-worth (Steele 1988), they seek to resolve this undesirable state of being (Higgins 1987; Kim and Rucker 2012; Han et al. 2015; White and Argo 2009; White et al. 2012). To achieve this, consumers cope with threats by a variety of means. For instance, consumers may cope with threat by acquiring possessions that affirm the self, a behaviour often called compensatory consumption (Han et al. 2015; Kim and Rucker 2012). This includes preferring, selecting, and spending more on products that help affirm the threatened identity (Gao et al. 2009; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011; White et al. 2012), a threatened underlying need (Mead et al. 2011), or one's global sense of self-worth (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010). For instance, Ward and Broniarczyk (2011) find that after purchasing an identity-threatening gift for close others,

consumers indicate greater affiliation with the threatened identity, bolstering their connection to it in response to the threat.

Consumers also often cope with threat through dissociative means. Dissociative coping involves distancing oneself from the source of threat, or denigrating it (Han et al. 2015; White and Argo 2009; Argo and Dahl 2018). For example, consumers may decrease their preferences for a given product or brand after experiencing a threat to a related social identity (White and Argo 2009). Consumers will also dissociate from products in order to preserve their fundamental needs, such as a need to be distinct or unique, increasing disposal intentions to facilitate coping when this need is threatened (White and Argo 2011), and avoiding options and abandoning preferences that would threaten this need (Berger and Heath 2007). Moreover, some consumers cope through derogating the source of the threat. For example, Argo and Dahl (2018) find that consumers who are low in appearance self-esteem experience threat in response to looking at a mannequin—a socially accepted ideal of beauty—and thus denigrate the clothing item worn by the mannequin to cope with this threat. Similarly, Dietz-Uhler (1999) finds that students who identify with their university will be more critical of and negative toward reports that paint their university in a negative light. Notably, dissociative responses such as avoidance and denigration are means of protecting the self from future harm (Sherman and Cohen 2006), and occur when consumers do not have other means of repairing or affirming the self (White and Argo 2009).

Self-Affirmation as a Buffer to Threat. Consumers are motivated to maintain a positive sense of self-worth (Steele 1988). Because threat can act to disrupt this, consumers may buffer against threat or cope with it through affirming their self-concept (Crocker et al. 2003; Crocker et al. 2008; McQueen and Klein 2006; Steele 1988; White and Argo 2009; White et al. 2012). For

example, writing about a value that is important to the self reinforces the individual's self-concept and is sufficient to buffer them against most subsequent psychological threats (i.e., a self-affirmation task; Crocker et al. 2008; Gao et al. 2009; Kim and Rucker 2012; McQueen and Klein 2006; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010). Indeed, providing consumers with the opportunity to affirm the self has been shown to decrease threat-responses such as mitigating threatened consumers' tendencies to seek status-related goods (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010), or to denigrate and pay less for a product (Argo and Dahl 2018).

Similarly, consumption choices can serve to affirm the self, such as choosing aesthetically pleasing products (Townsend and Sood 2012). Merely ruminating on having products related to high-status can affirm the self and buffer against threat (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010). Kim and Rucker (2012) also find that consumers can buffer themselves against oncoming threat by making strategic consumption choices. Moreover, these authors find that while proactively preparing for an anticipated threat causes compensatory consumption in the (potentially) threatened domain, reactively coping with the threat causes increased consumption across domains as a means of distracting oneself from the threat. They argue that this proactive affirmation acts as "a protective layer to the self prior to a self-threat" (p. 816). As such, proactive buffering is more strategic and effective than reactive coping in attenuating certain threats, as it acts as a shield against ever experiencing threat, whereas reactive affirmation is a coping mechanism.

In sum, consumers who experience threat are motivated to cope with this threat, often through dissociating from the source of threat (Han et al. 2015; White and Argo 2009; White et al. 2012). However, consumers who are affirmed prior to experiencing threat are able to buffer against this threat (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010; White and Dahl 2018). Next, I turn to the

literature on recommendation focus to provide insight into when consumers will and will not be threatened by negative feedback on their WOM.

Recommendation Focus

Several models have been proposed to explain why consumers engage in WOM (Berger 2014; Dichter 1966; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Early work in this area proposes four motives for WOM: productive-involvement, self-involvement, other-involvement, and message-involvement (Dichter 1966). More recently, Hennig-Thurau and his colleagues (2014) examine online WOM and argue that electronic WOM is driven by a desire for social connection, other-focused motives (such as a concern for other consumers), self-enhancement motives, and economic incentives. Finally, Berger (2014) proposes five main drivers of WOM: impression-management, emotional regulation, information acquisition, social bonding, and persuasion. Across these different models of what drives consumers to engage in WOM, a consistent distinction is that consumers can make recommendations with either the self (i.e., self-involvement, self-enhancement, and impression-management) or others (i.e., other-involvement, social connection and concern for others, and social bonding) in mind. This recommendation focus—whether the consumer is focused on the self or the other person—is thus a key distinction in consumer motives for making recommendations.

Although recommendation focus (self versus other) has been a key distinction arising across all major models of WOM motives for over 50 years, only recently has research begun to examine its implications in WOM settings. For instance, Chen and Kirmani (2015) distinguish between consumers with a persuasion motive (which they argue may be related to self-enhancement) and those with an affiliation motive (other-focus) and examine how these motives

impact how consumers strategically tailor what they recommend, and to whom. Recent research from Dubois, Bonezzi, and De Angelis (2016) also finds that consumers share more negative content with close social others, due to an other-focused motive to protect others, and more positive content with distant social others, due to a self-focused motive to self-enhance. Similarly, Barasch and Berger (2014) find that other-focused consumers recommend products that will be useful for their recipient, whereas self-focused consumers recommend products that reflect more positively on them (see also: Berger 2014). Furthermore, these authors find that when recommending to a single person, individuals are generally more other-focused (Barasch and Berger 2014). Outside of WOM contexts, research on egocentrism has found that consumers are more other-focused (i.e., less egocentric) when they have a greater degree of self-other overlap with others (Savitsky et al. 2011; Tu et al. 2016). This is because having a greater degree of overlap with others increases one's tendency to anchor on their own perspective and project this view onto others, becoming more self-focused (i.e., more egocentrically biased). Individuals even become more egocentrically-biased simply from having a shared opinion with another person (Ross, Greene, and House 1977).

Notably, although prior work in this area finds that recommendation focus guides what consumers recommend to others (Barasch and Berger 2014; Chen and Kirmani 2015; Dubois et al. 2016), this past work has not examined the downstream consequences of how recommendation focus may affect the recommender, particularly upon receiving feedback about their recommendation. I propose that recommendation focus will have an impact on how consumers respond to feedback on their WOM recommendations, and in particular whether they experience threat as a function of negative feedback. In the next section, I combine the theory

presented on recommendation focus, feedback, and threat to outline my hypotheses about how these factors pertain to subsequent WOM after receiving feedback on one's recommendations.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

After a consumer has recommended an experience to someone, they may receive feedback on this experience. In particular, whether the other person liked or disliked the recommendation will act as positive or negative feedback to the recommender. To the extent that positive feedback reinforces behaviour (Skinner 1953), and is readily accepted by individuals (Ilgen et al. 1979), positive feedback should maintain subsequent WOM intentions without increasing them. That is, positive feedback should not be sufficient to increase subsequent WOM (relative to neutral and negative feedback), given that positive feedback does not prompt a change in behaviour of the same magnitude as negative feedback (Baumeister et al. 2001). However, to the extent that negative feedback is inherently aversive (Ilgen et al. 1979) and often threatening (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010), I posit that negative feedback on WOM recommendations can act as a threat to consumers, and should be sufficient to decrease subsequent WOM intentions.

Notably, however, I predict that recommendation focus (self versus other) will moderate the impact of negative feedback on subsequent WOM intentions. In particular, I predict that only other-focused consumers will be threatened by this feedback. This is because other-focused recommenders consider the preferences of their recipient to make a recommendation, only to be told that their recipient disliked it, which is negative and aversive. As such, the recommended experience itself becomes a source of threat, and consumers will be motivated to cope with this

threat (Steele 1988). Importantly, consumers should cope through dissociative means such as avoiding the experience (White and Argo 2009; White and Argo 2011), given that consumers distance themselves from sources of threat (Berger and Heath 2007; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011) and because dissociating is a self-serving means of restoring one's self-worth (Campbell and Sedikides 1999; Steele 1988; White et al. 2012). This dissociation will manifest as a decrease in recommenders' subsequent WOM intentions, relative to when they are not threatened (i.e., when they receive positive feedback). Put simply, after receiving negative (versus positive) feedback on an experience they have recommended, other-focused consumers will be threatened and thus decrease their likelihood of recommending it to others.

H1: Other-focused consumers who receive negative feedback on an experience they have recommended will decrease their subsequent WOM intentions for this experience, relative to those who experience positive or neutral feedback.

H2: Threat will mediate the relationship between feedback valence and subsequent WOM intentions among consumers who make other-focused recommendations.

Moreover, I predict that self-focus will attenuate the impact of negative feedback on subsequent WOM. In particular, making a recommendation based solely on one's own preferences (i.e., being self-focused) will act as a buffer against negative feedback, causing consumers to continue recommending the experience to the same extent as those who receive positive feedback. This is because a focus on the self should act as a "protective shield" (Kim and Rucker 2012) against threat, much the same as a self-affirmation task does. To the extent that the self can be affirmed through one's consumption choices in a manner that buffers the self against threat (Kim and Rucker 2012; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010; Townsend and Sood 2012), I

posit that making a recommendation solely for the self should have a similar impact, and so buffer their self-concept against the threat inherent in the negative feedback from others. In this vein, recommending based only on one's own preferences should lead to consumers maintaining their subsequent WOM intentions after negative (versus positive) feedback.

H3: Self-focused consumers who receive negative feedback on an experience they have recommended will maintain their subsequent WOM intentions for this experience, relative to those who experience positive feedback.

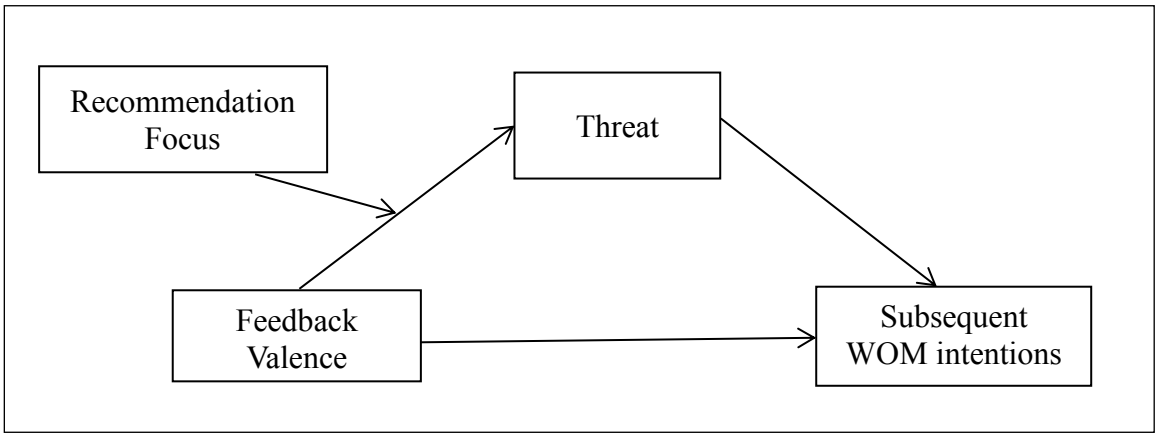

FIGURE 1. The overall theoretical model for the impact of feedback valence on subsequent WOM.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Overview of Experiments

I test my predictions across four experiments. In all experiments, I study a positive hedonic experience that is being recommended, as consumers use experiences as a means of defining the self (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014). All experiments manipulate feedback valence. In experiment 1, I hold other-focus constant to examine the main

effect of feedback (positive, negative, neutral, and no-feedback). In experiment 2, I again hold other-focus constant and show process through moderation (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005) using a self-affirmation task. This demonstrates that threat is driving the decrease in recommenders' subsequent WOM after negative feedback. This method—process through moderation—is recommended when an underlying variable is difficult to measure (Spencer et al. 2005), such as is the case with threat, in that consumers may not endorse feeling 'threatened' in a psychological manner, as 'threat' can have broader semantic connotations to consumers. As such, self-affirmation tasks are commonly used in research to buffer individuals against threat, and so provide evidence of threat as the underlying process (Argo and Dahl 2018; Crocker, Niiya, and Mischkowski 2008; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010, Steele 1988; White and Argo 2009). In particular, I demonstrate that affirming the self prior to experiencing the threat from negative feedback attenuates the effect of threat, as consumers are buffered against it and thus do not need to cope with it (Steele 1988), whereas affirming the self after experiencing the threat is not sufficient to fully attenuate the impact of the negative feedback (Kim and Rucker 2012).

In experiments 3 and 4, I manipulate recommendation focus and do so in two different ways. First, following models on drivers of WOM (Dichter 1966), I directly manipulate whether consumers make recommendations based on their own personal preferences (self-focus) or else on the preferences of their recipient (other-focus). Second, given that having shared opinions causes an individual to become more egocentrically biased with respect to others (Ross et al. 1977) and that individuals are more egocentric (i.e., self-focused) when they have a greater degree of self-other overlap (Savitsky et al. 2011; Tu et al. 2016), I manipulate whether the recommender and the recipient have a shared preference in the product category in which they are making a recommendation (see also: Walker Naylor, Poynor Lamberton, and Norton 2011).

If they have an overlapping preference, the recommender will be self-focused and make a recommendation in line with their own preferences, as they have no alternate information on which to base their recommendation. If they do not have an overlapping preference, consumers will be more other-focused and consider the (different) preferences of the other person. As such, each of my experiments allows me to test the impact of feedback valence on subsequent WOM, and I demonstrate that the deleterious effect of negative feedback arises due to threat and is attenuated by being self-focused when making a recommendation.

Alternate Explanations

Notably, in addition to threat as an underlying process, there are competing explanations for the decrease in recommenders' WOM intentions following negative feedback. Each of my experiments will serve to rule out some of these competing explanations. First, in experiment 1, I will rule out the possibility that the impact of feedback valence is driven by an increase in WOM intentions after positive feedback rather than a decrease from negative feedback. This will provide initial evidence that negative feedback is indeed threatening, and this threat is what drives the decrease in recommenders' subsequent WOM intentions.

Similarly, in experiment 2, I will provide evidence as to the nature of this threat. In particular, threats can occur to one's general self-concept (i.e., "self" threats; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010) or to a specific identity (e.g., to their identity as a student of a particular institution; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011). I posit that in the present research, negative feedback is threatening to consumers' general self-concept and not specifically to their identity as a recommender. To rule this out, I will measure not only participants' subsequent WOM intentions for the specific experience they receive feedback on, but for all experiences in this product

category. If their identity as a recommender has been threatened, consumers should decrease their subsequent WOM intentions for all experiences in the product category, as they will feel their "recommender" sense of self is the problem. However, if this particular experience is merely acting as a *source* of threat to recommenders, they should distance themselves only from this single experience and not decrease their likelihood of recommending other experiences. In a follow-up study to experiment 2, I will also rule out the possibility that the nature of the threat consumers experience is a social threat (i.e., a threat that evokes their belonging needs) rather than a threat to their personal self-concept (i.e., a threat that evokes their need for positive self-regard and self-worth; White et al. 2012, see also: Steele 1988). This will provide insight into the nature of the threat, and thus how consumers should cope with it (i.e., through replenishing belonging or bolstering the self-concept).

In experiments 1 and 3, I will rule out the possibility that the impact of feedback on subsequent WOM arises due to attribution—that is, what the recommender 'blames' as the issue for why the other person has provided them with negative feedback (Koch, Müller, and Sieverding 2008; Liden and Mitchell 1985). I will rule this out by providing participants with a specific element to which the 'blame' may be attributed (experiment 1) and by demonstrating that perceptions of whether the feedback received is justified do not underlie the decrease in their subsequent WOM (experiment 3). Finally, in experiment 4, I will rule out two alternate explanations. First, I will rule out the possibility that perspective-taking (Epley et al. 2004) underlies the current findings. Moreover, I will rule out the possibility that these effects arise due to cognitive consistency theories such as Balance Theory (Heider 1958) or cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1962). In each experiment, I will provide details for the competing hypotheses provided by these alternate explanations and how I specifically rule out these possibilities.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

PILOT STUDY

I first conducted a pilot study to garner insight into the type of experiences that people recommend and actually receive feedback on, to use these types of experiences in my experiments. I specifically examined negative feedback, since individuals are less likely to accept negative feedback (Ilgen et al. 1979). Thus, designing experimental stimuli where participants would believe and accept negative feedback from others was paramount. To this end, participants were instructed: "Please think of a time that you introduced one of your experiences to another person, but this other person did not like the experience. Please take a minute to try and recall a time that this occurred." A total of 98 student participants (M_{age} = 21.26, SD = 2.97, 41% female) completed this study, and of these, 71 participants indicated that they could recall such an experience.

Participants first described the experience and what was being recommended, and self-reported what type of experience it was from a list that included restaurants, movies, TV shows, music, art galleries, cafes, sporting events, vacation destinations, outdoor parks, camping locations, and an "other" category in which they could specify another respond. Participants' experiences fell into 5 categories: 38% recalled movies or TV shows, 30% recalled music (artists or songs), 20% recalled restaurants, 9% recalled sports or sporting events, and 4% recalled a different type of experience (e.g., a vacation location/city). Based on this pilot study, my

subsequent experiments examine media, such as movie trailers and songs, as the focal experience that participants recommend within the study.

EXPERIMENT 1

The goal of this study was to provide initial evidence for the impact of receiving feedback on a recommendation. To this end, I designed four different feedback conditions: positive, negative, neutral, and no feedback control. The no feedback control was included to establish a baseline for how likely consumers are to engage in subsequent WOM in the absence of feedback. I predicted that negative feedback would lead to a lower likelihood of engaging in subsequent WOM relative to the other three conditions. Furthermore, an absence of a difference across the three other conditions would provide evidence that there is a decrease in subsequent WOM in response to negative feedback, rather than an increase in WOM in response to positive feedback, lending support to H1.

Design and Participants

This study was a 1-factor design with feedback valence manipulated at 4 levels between-subjects: positive vs. negative vs. neutral vs. no feedback. This study was run online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), with a sample of 301 participants (M_{age} = 35.55, SD = 10.99, 50.5% female).

Procedure

Participants were first told that they would be paired with another person on MTurk based on their demographic information. They were then asked to indicate their age, gender, geographic location (state), and first name. Unknown to participants, such a pairing never happened and instead was a cover story. Participants then saw a loading screen before being told that they were matched with a person of the same gender living in the same state. They were also given a name for their ostensible partner ("Tim" or "Ashley", depending on participants' gender). This was done to bolster the cover story and enhance realism.

Following this, participants were given lists of three questions that they could ask their partner as a "get to know each other" task. For example, they could choose between asking their partner to indicate their favourite animal, their favourite fruit, or their favourite subject from school. They were given three lists of three questions to choose from, selected one from each list, and were given a different question ostensibly selected by their partner. Participants were all shown the same answers from their ostensible partner for these questions (see Appendix A for full "get to know each other" task). This was designed to bolster the cover story that they were interacting with an actual person and to provide some basic information about this person so that all participants had the same knowledge about the partner.

After completing this task, participants watched three movie trailers for upcoming block-buster movies, ranging from 15 to 40 seconds each in length. They were then told that they were randomly assigned to the role of "recommender" and that they would choose one of these three trailers for their partner to watch, none of which their partner had previously seen. Participants were told to choose the trailer they "think will be your partner's favorite" and to "pick the one

you believe they will like the most." These instructions were designed to ensure that participants were other-focused in this study.

Participants then answered filler questions while their partner ostensibly watched their recommended trailer, and after this they received "feedback" provided from their partner about the trailer. The feedback was manipulated between-subjects. In the positive, neutral, and negative conditions, participants saw responses to three 7-point Likert rating scales allegedly completed by their partner: "I liked the trailer," "I enjoyed the trailer," and "The trailer was good". In the negative condition, their partner had filled these out as 2, 1, and 2 (out of 7) respectively, and the participant saw that the mean rating was 1.66. In the positive condition, these were 6, 7, and 6, with a mean score of 6.33. In the neutral condition, these were 4, 3, and 5, with a mean score of 4 (the midpoint of the scale). Finally, in the no feedback condition, participants were not told they would receive feedback and did not see feedback from their partner (see Appendix B for sample stimuli).

After the feedback manipulation, participants responded to the key dependent variable: "If the opportunity presents itself, how likely will you be to recommend this trailer to someone else who has never seen it before" on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = "not at all", 7 = "very likely"). I included a manipulation check question to ensure that participants in the feedback conditions accurately understood the manipulation ("If you had to categorize your partner's opinion of the trailer, would you say they…" with "disliked" = 1 and "liked" = 7 on a Likert scale). Finally, I probed for suspicion using 5 items (i.e., "to what extent do you believe your partner in this study was:" real, believable, authentic, fake [reversed-scored], and honest, on a Likert scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree", with one distractor ["an expert"] which was not

included in the analysis). These items formed a suspicion index ($\alpha = .93$). Following this, all participants were debriefed.

Results

Given that I use deception and that my results rely on the participant believing the (fake) feedback from the other person, I control for suspicion in this study and all subsequent studies using the suspicion index. Moreover, I also controlled for the specific movie trailer participants had recommended in the analyses using dummy variables. Specifically, participants watched three trailers so two dummy variables were included, one for if they selected the first trailer (1, else 0), one for if they selected the second (1, else 0), and the third movie trailer served as the baseline (excluding these control variables does not substantively change the results; see Appendix D for more detail).

Manipulation Checks. The manipulation check was designed to ensure that participants accurately understood the feedback from their partner. As such, I included only the positive, neutral, and negative feedback conditions in this analysis, as only these conditions received feedback and thus only these conditions answered this question. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the manipulation check was significant ($F(2, 226) = 301.07$, $p < .0001$). Those in the negative feedback condition agreed that their partner liked the movie less ($M = 1.67$) than those in the positive condition ($M = 6.41$, $t(226) = 24.54$; $p < .0001$) or the neutral condition ($M = 4.29$, $t(226) = 13.43$; $p < .001$). Those in the positive condition also rated the feedback as more positive than those in the neutral condition ($t(226) = 11.07$; $p < .001$).

Hypothesis Testing. In line with my predictions, there was a significant effect of the feedback manipulation on participants' likelihood of engaging in subsequent WOM ($F(3, 293) = 3.68$, $p = .012$, partial $\eta^2 = .036$). I decomposed this effect via post hoc tests. I found that only the negative condition ($M = 4.59$) differed from the other conditions. Those in the negative feedback condition were less likely to engage in subsequent WOM than those in the neutral ($M = 5.19$; $t(293) = 2.11$; $p = .035$), positive ($M = 5.36$, $t(293) = 2.98$; $p = .003$), or no feedback ($M = 5.13$, $t(293) = 2.77$; $p = .006$) conditions, none of which significantly differed from the others (ps $> .4$).

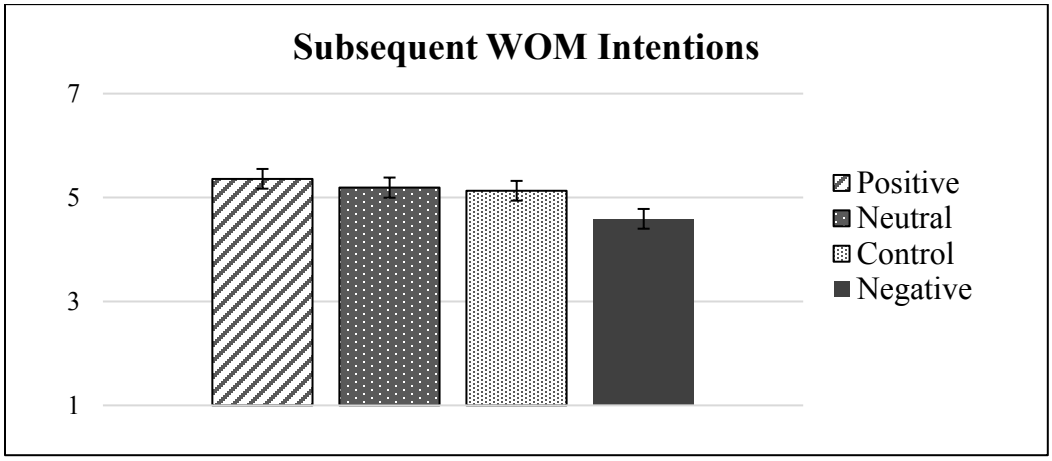

FIGURE 2. Subsequent WOM intentions for the movie trailer.

Discussion

This study provides initial evidence for my hypothesis that receiving negative feedback about an experience—in this study, a movie trailer—that one has recommended causes the recommender to decrease their subsequent WOM intentions. Furthermore, as predicted, positive feedback maintained subsequent WOM but did not increase it (relative to no feedback or neutral feedback). This indicates that positive feedback on WOM is not driving an increase but rather

that negative feedback is specifically driving a decrease in sharing intentions, which is in line with the notion that negative feedback is inherently aversive (Ilgen et al. 1979), and thus threatening to consumers (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010).

One possible explanation for these effects is that the consumer has no specific reason for why the other person disliked the recommendation, and thus they can only make an attribution that the experience itself is not good. Providing them with a specific reason may allow them to attribute the blame to a specific aspect of the experience and thus no longer be threatened by the feedback (Koch et al. 2008). If this is the case, providing specific reasons for the negative feedback should attenuate the impact of this feedback on subsequent WOM.

To test this alternative hypothesis, I ran a follow-up study on credit and paid student participants ($N = 82$; $M_{age} = 23.88$, SD = 8.63; 70.0% female) with three between-subjects conditions: specific dislike, general dislike, and a no feedback control. Participants read a scenario in which they had introduced a restaurant to a friend. Other-focus was held constant by having each participant write about this friend at the outset of the study. They then read that this other person either felt it "just wasn't that great" (general dislike), disliked specific elements such as the menu options (specific dislike), or provided no feedback (control). Replicating Experiment 1, there was a main effect of feedback valence ($F(2, 79) = 4.23$, $p = .018$, partial $\eta^2 = .097$). Both the general ($M = 5.00$; $t(79) = -2.78$, $p = .007$) and specific dislike conditions ($M = 5.26$; $t(79) = -2.10$, $p = .038$) led to lower subsequent WOM intentions than the control condition ($M = 6.07$). However, results showed no difference between the general or specific dislike conditions in terms of their subsequent WOM intentions ($t(79) = -.67$, $p > .5$).

Experiment 1 and the follow-up study provide initial evidence for the impact of negative feedback on subsequent WOM. To demonstrate that the drop in subsequent WOM intentions

occurs because consumers are threatened by negative feedback, I use a self-affirmation task in the next experiment to buffer consumers against this threat.

EXPERIMENT 2

The primary aim of this study was to provide evidence that other-focused consumers decrease their subsequent WOM intentions after negative feedback due to being threatened by this feedback. To this end, experiment 2 included a self-affirmation task (Steele 1988; McQueen and Klein 2006) to provide process evidence by manipulating the proposed causal mechanism (Spencer et al. 2005); that is, process through moderation (Jacoby and Sassenberg 2011; Judd, Yzerbyt, and Muller 2014). I predicted that the no-affirmation control condition would replicate the results from prior studies such that participants who received negative feedback would decrease their subsequent WOM intentions. Moreover, I expected that only participants who completed the self-affirmation task before receiving negative feedback would have the impact of this feedback fully attenuated. Conversely, participants who completed the self-affirmation task after receiving negative feedback would not be fully replenished by this affirmation, because they have already experienced the threat and begun to cope (Kim and Rucker 2012). As such, this study allows me to test H2.

Design and Participants

This study was a 2 (feedback: positive vs. negative) by 3 (self-affirmation: before vs. after vs. no-affirmation control) between-subjects design (N = 446 MTurk participants; M_{age} = 35.72, SD = 10.84, 52.9% female), holding recommendation focus constant as other-focus.

Procedure

The procedure for this study was similar to that of experiment 1. Participants agreed to participate and were ostensibly paired with a partner based on their gender and location. All participants completed the same 'get to know each other' task as in experiment 1. Following this, they watched three movie trailers for soon-to-be-released blockbusters and were told to recommend one to their partner to watch, specifically being told to select the one they felt their partner would like the best (i.e., holding other-focus constant). The self-affirmation manipulation was implemented at this point. Participants in the affirm-before condition completed the self-affirmation task before receiving feedback from their ostensible partner. Participants in the affirm-after condition received their partner's feedback and then went on to complete the self-affirmation task. Participants in the no-affirmation condition received the feedback from their partner and did not complete an affirmation task at any point.

The self-affirmation task was adopted from Steele (1988; see also: McQueen and Klein 2006; Crocker et al. 2008) and involved a brief writing task in which participants were given a list of 11 core values and told to rank them in order of importance to themselves, with 1 being the most important and 11 being the least. Participants were then instructed to write about the value that was most important to them and why it was meaningful, and to recall and write about a time this value was important.

Feedback valence was manipulated in the same manner as experiment 1, such that participants saw rating scales they believed were filled out by their partner, and these scales either indicated the partner liked (positive) or did not like (negative) the trailer. Following the feedback and affirmation task (or lack thereof), participants all completed the dependent measure for their subsequent WOM intentions, as well as a measure to provide evidence of the nature of

the threat. In particular, I asked participants their likelihood of recommending "any" movie trailer again in the future ("If the opportunity presented itself, how likely would you be to recommend any movie trailer again", 1 = "not at all"; 7 = "very likely"). This was followed by manipulation checks (whether the other person liked or disliked the trailer), and the suspicion items (α = .94), all measured as in experiment 1, before being debriefed.

Results

As with experiment 1, I controlled for suspicion and included dummy variables for the movie trailer that participants recommended to their partner (two dummy variables for selecting either the first or second trailers, with the third trailer acting as a baseline) in these analyses.

Manipulation Checks. A 2 (feedback valence: positive vs. negative) x 3 (affirmation: before vs. after vs. no-affirmation) ANOVA was conducted to ensure that participants understood the feedback from their partner and that the self-affirmation condition did not impact how they interpreted the feedback. The simple effect of feedback was significant, such that participants in the negative feedback condition reported that their partner liked the trailer less (M = 1.76) than those in the positive feedback condition (M = 6.16; $F(1, 435) = 1172.68$, $p < .0001$). There was no significant main effect of affirmation ($F(1, 435) = .62$, $p > .5$) nor an interaction ($F(1, 435) = .90$, $p > .4$).

Hypothesis Testing. A 2 (feedback valence: positive vs. negative) x 3 (affirmation: before vs. after vs. no-affirmation) ANOVA was conducted with subsequent WOM intentions as the dependent variable. Results revealed the main effect of feedback was significant ($F(1, 435)$ =

10.69, $p = .001$), but there was no main effect of affirmation ($F(2, 435) = 0.02$, $p > .9$). Importantly, the interaction was significant ($F(2, 435) = 3.01$, $p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .014$). Replicating prior studies, planned contrasts revealed that when there was no affirmation, participants in the negative feedback condition decreased their subsequent WOM intentions ($M = 4.44$) relative to those in the positive feedback condition ($M = 5.84$, $t(435) = 3.71$, $p < .0001$). In line with my predictions, those in the affirm-after condition who received negative feedback also decreased their subsequent WOM ($M = 4.99$) relative to those in the positive feedback condition ($M = 5.39$; $t(435) = -1.69$, $p = .092$), although this difference was only marginally significant. Notably, this difference was fully attenuated among those in the affirm-before condition ($M_{neg} = 4.84$; $M_{pos} = 5.55$; $t(435) = -.047$, $p > .6$). Further, the difference between the affirm-before positive condition and the no-affirm positive condition was marginal ($t(435) = -1.65$, $p = .10$).

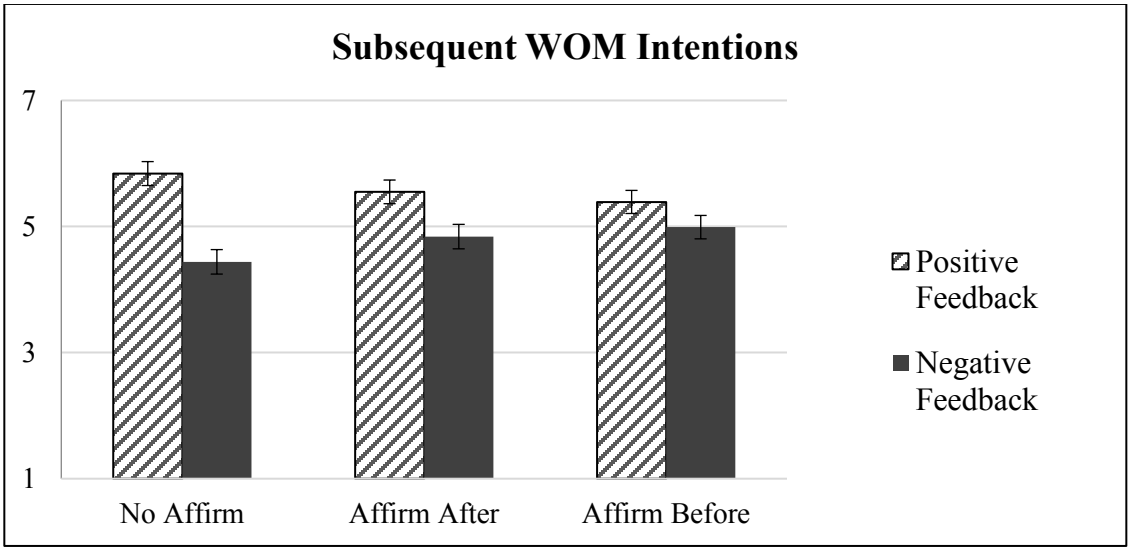

FIGURE 3. Subsequent WOM by feedback valence and affirmation.

I also assessed participants' likelihood of recommending any trailer again in the future. This was done to confirm that consumers would only decrease their WOM intentions for the specific trailer they recommended and not for all trailers. This would suggest that the recommended trailer becomes a source of threat after negative feedback, causing consumers to dissociate from it, rather than it being the case that the consumer's identity as a recommender has been threatened, which would decrease their subsequent recommendation intentions for *any* trailers. In line with my predictions, neither of the main effects (feedback valence: $F(1, 434) = .11$, $p > .7$; affirmation: $F(2, 434) = .02$, $p > .9$), nor the interaction ($F(2, 434) = 1.49$, $p > .2$) were significant.

Discussion

This experiment provides evidence that participants decrease their subsequent WOM intentions after receiving negative feedback on a recommendation because of the threatening nature of this feedback. In particular, participants who were affirmed before receiving this feedback did not decrease their subsequent WOM after negative (vs. positive) feedback, whereas those who were not affirmed and those who were affirmed after were less likely to continue wanting to recommend the experience after this feedback.

Importantly, threats can either be to one's global self-concept (prompting a need to affirm one's individual self-concept) or to a specific identity (Ward and Broniarczyk 2011). Given that consumers receive negative feedback, I posited that the threat they experience in the present research acts as a global threat to their self-concept (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010) and not as a threat to an identity as a recommender. In line with this, I found that only recommendation intentions for this single trailer were impacted, and that participants were not less likely to

recommend any movie trailer. This provides evidence that it is not consumers' identity as a recommender being threatened, but rather that they are dissociating from only this trailer, as it has become a source of threat.

However, it remains possible that consumers' personal self-concept is not threatened, but rather their social self-concept (evoking a need to affirm through belongingness with others; White et al. 2012). That is, it is possible that negative feedback threatens consumers fundamental belonging needs rather than their self-concept, and thus that consumers would be better to buffer their belonging needs against this threat, rather than to buffer their general self-concept. To ensure that social threat does not underlie my effects, I conducted a follow-up study that manipulated feedback (positive vs. negative) and social affirmation (social affirm: affirm vs. not) between subjects, while holding other-focus constant. One hundred and ten undergraduates (M_{age} = 20.27, SD = 1.75, 30.0% female) completed this experiment; nine were removed for guessing the nature of the cover-story. Participants watched movie trailers and recommended one to an ostensible partner. The social affirmation manipulation (White et al. 2012) was implemented before participants received their partner's negative feedback. Replicating my prior results, the main effect of negative feedback was significant ($F(1, 94) = 30.83$, $p < .0001$). However, neither the main effect of social affirmation ($F(1, 94) = .09$, $p > .7$), nor the interaction with feedback valence ($F(1, 94) = .30$, $p > .5$) were significant. This provides converging evidence that it is specifically a threat to one's personal self-concept that drives the decrease in subsequent WOM intentions when participants are other-focused, rather than it being a threat to their need for affiliation and connection with others (White et al. 2012). This is important in informing how consumers may cope with this threat.

To examine how feedback valence interacts with recommendation focus, the following two studies directly manipulate recommendation focus between-subjects.

EXPERIMENT 3

The main goal of experiment 3 was to provide evidence that recommendation focus (self vs. other) interacts with feedback valence. In particular, I predicted that I would replicate the effect from experiments 1 and 2, such that those in the other-focus condition would decrease their subsequent WOM after negative feedback. I further predicted that this effect would be attenuated among those in the self-focused condition, as self-focus would act as a protective shield that buffers against them against the threat. This study thus allowed me to test H3. Finally, I also collected measures of consumers' desire to dissociate from the experience to provide additional evidence that negative feedback causes other-focused consumers to dissociate from the experience in order to cope.

Design and Participants

This study used a 2 (feedback: positive vs. negative) by 2 (recommendation focus: self vs. other) between-subjects design. I ran this study with undergraduate students at the University of Alberta. A sample of 110 students were collected for this study; seven participants were excluded for guessing the specific nature of the study's deception (i.e., indicating that they knew their partner and the feedback was fake the entire time), leaving a final sample of 103 (M_{age} = 21.56, SD = 2.33, 51.0% female).

Procedure

This study was run in the lab in groups of 2-6. At the beginning of the study, the experimenter explained that participants would be put into pairs for a short "get to know each other" task, and would then sit at networked computers and complete the rest of the study as digital partners. In actuality, only the "get to know each other" task was truly paired, and the entire digital portion of the study involved only an ostensible connection to their partner.

Participants were given 5 minutes to pose and answer questions with one another face to face using question lists adapted from the Relationship Closeness Induction Task (Sedikides et al. 1999). Given that participants later recommend a movie trailer to one another, these lists did not include questions of favorite movies or TV shows or musical artists. The reasons for this task were the same as in experiment 1: to bolster the cover story and realism for participants. Following the "get to know each other" task, participants were then directed to separate computer cubicles which each contained headphones they used for the media in the study. At these computers, participants underwent a similar procedure to experiment 1. They watched four movie trailers for upcoming block-busters ranging from 15 to 45 seconds in length.

Next, participants were told that they had been randomly assigned to the role of "recommender" and would recommend one of these trailers to their partner, who had ostensibly seen a different list of trailers. Here, I manipulated recommendation focus. Participants read: "Please select the one you think will be your partner's favorite from the trailers you watched in this session to recommend to your partner. Pick the one you believe they will like the most" as the other-focus manipulation, and "Please select your personal favorite from the trailers you watched in this session to recommend to your partner. Pick the one you liked the most" as the self-focus manipulation (see Appendix C for more details).

After selecting a trailer, participants answered filler questions while they believed their partner was watching their recommended trailer and filling out a short response to it. In this study, I manipulated feedback using a short written response allegedly from their partner. In the positive condition, the feedback read: "I really liked the trailer the other person picked. I normally like most kinds of movies and I haven't seen that trailer before, and I think it was pretty good. It seems worth seeing." In the negative condition, the feedback read: "I didn't really like the trailer the other person picked. I normally like most kinds of movies and I haven't seen that trailer before, but I didn't think it was all that good. It doesn't seem worth seeing."

After this, I assessed the key dependent variable (subsequent WOM) using the same item as in experiment 1, and I measured consumers' dissociative tendencies toward the movie trailer. In particular, I assessed the desire to "withdraw from" and "avoid" the trailer (r = .89) as evidence that consumers' decrease in subsequent WOM is correlated with their desire to dissociate from the trailer. Furthermore, I assessed the extent to which they felt their partner's feedback was "justified" (1 = "Not at all", 7 = "Very justified") to rule out the possibility that participants in the other-focus condition felt that their partner's feedback was more justified in the other-focus conditions, and that this perception would explain the drop in their subsequent WOM intentions after negative feedback.

Following these measures, I included a manipulation check for feedback valence (the extent to which the recipient liked or disliked the recommendation, 1 = "disliked", 7 = "liked") and for recommendation focus ("Whose preferences did you base your selection of the trailer on?", 1 = "My preferences", 7 = "My partner's preferences") and included the same suspicion index (α = .90) as in prior experiments before debriefing participants.

Results

Similar to the prior studies, the analyses controlled for suspicion as well as including dummy variables for the specific movie trailer participants chose. This study employed three movie trailer dummy variables, with the fourth trailer acting as the baseline for comparison.

Manipulation Checks. A 2 (feedback valence: positive vs. negative) x 2 (recommendation focus: self vs. other) ANOVA was conducted to ensure that participants understood the feedback from their partner and that they based their selection of the movie trailer in line with their partner's preferences versus their own. The manipulation check for feedback valence was significant, such that participants in the negative feedback condition found the feedback to be more negative ($M = 1.72$) than those in the positive feedback condition ($M = 6.09$; $F(1, 95) = 648.12$, $p < .0001$). There was no significant main effect of recommendation focus ($F(1, 95) = 1.67$, $p > .2$) nor a significant interaction ($F(1, 95) = .01$, $p > .9$). Similarly, the manipulation check for recommendation focus was significant. Participants in the self-focus conditions reported making their selection based more on their own preferences ($M = 2.10$) than their partner's ($M = 3.63$; $t(95) = 19.29$, $p < .0001$). There was no significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 95) = .046$, $p > .8$) nor a significant interaction ($F(1, 95) = 1.16$, $p > .2$).

Hypothesis Testing. A 2 (feedback valence: positive vs. negative) x 2 (recommendation focus: self vs. other) ANOVA was conducted with WOM intentions as the dependent variable. Results revealed the main effect of feedback was significant ($F(1, 95) = 7.81$, $p = .006$), as was the main effect of recommendation focus ($F(1, 95) = 7.56$, $p = .007$), and importantly, the interaction was significant ($F(1, 95) = 4.07$, $p = .047$, partial $\eta^2 = .041$). In line with my

predictions, planned contrasts revealed that when participants were other-focused (i.e., made a recommendation based on their partner's preferences), there was a significant impact of feedback on their recommendation (M_{pos} = 5.36; M_{neg} = 3.88 $t(95) = 3.50$; $p = .001$). When participants were self-focused (i.e., made their recommendation in line with a personal preference), this difference was not significant (M_{pos} = 5.60; M_{neg} = 5.15; $t(95) = .39$ $p > .5$). Notably, the other-focus negative condition differed significantly from all other conditions (ps < .001), none of which differed from each other (ps > .5).

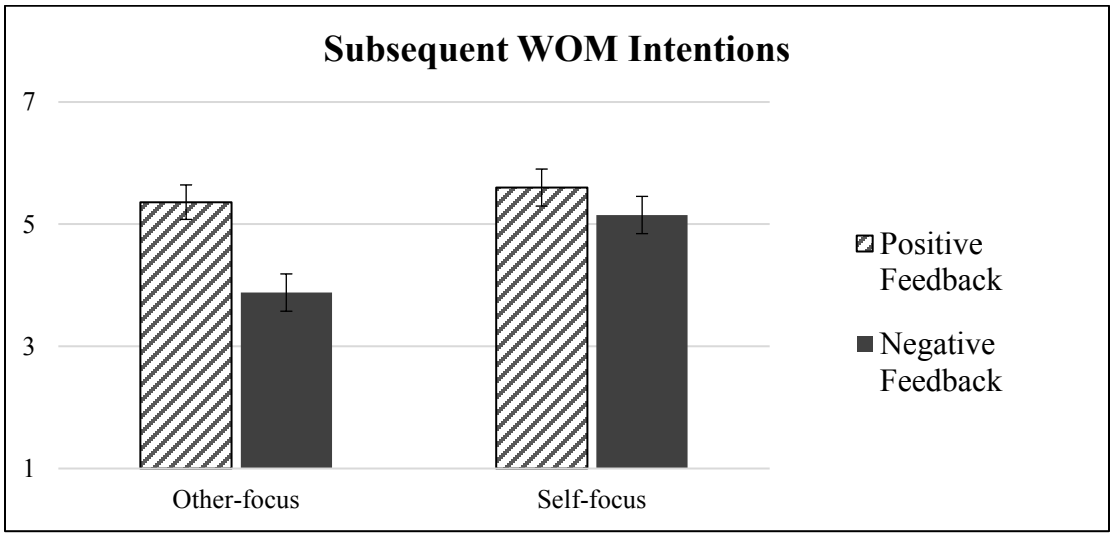

FIGURE 4. Subsequent WOM by feedback valence and recommendation focus.

Dissociation. I examined the interaction between recommendation focus and feedback valence in impacting participants' desire to dissociate from the experience. Results revealed the main effect of feedback was significant ($F(1, 95) = 8.15$, $p = .005$), as was the main effect of recommendation focus ($F(1, 95) = 4.20$, $p = .043$), although the interaction was not significant ($F(1, 95) = .65$, $p > .4$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$). Most importantly, I found that dissociation was significantly and negatively correlated with subsequent WOM intentions ($r = -.41$, $p < .0001$).

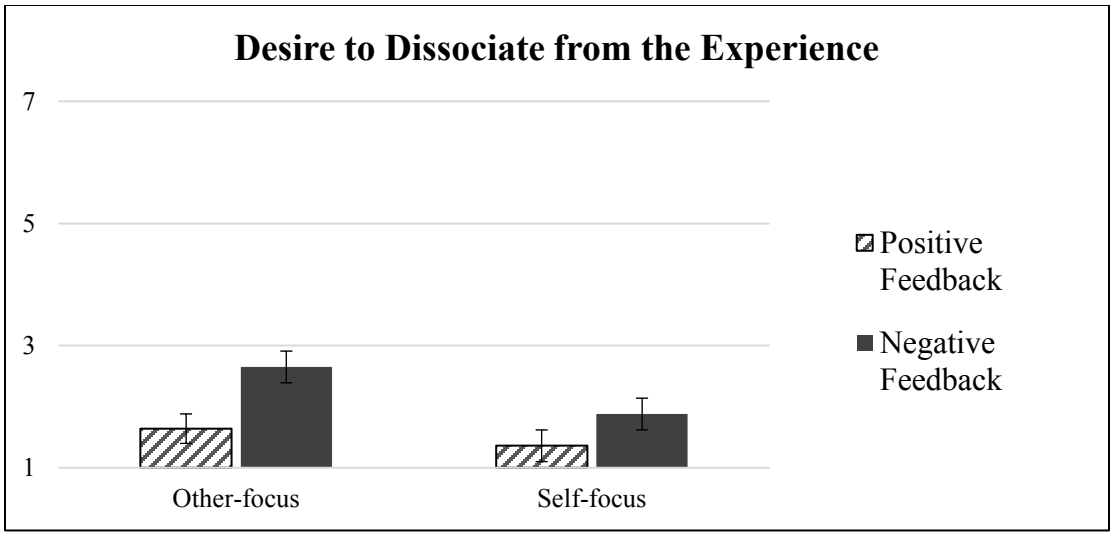

FIGURE 5. Dissociation by feedback valence and recommendation focus.

Alternate Explanations. I used this study to further rule out the idea that consumers decrease their subsequent WOM intentions because they make the attribution that the experience itself is to blame for the other person disliking it. In particular, participants in the other-focused condition may have felt that their partner's feedback was more justified than those in the self-focused condition, and this could be driving their decrease in subsequent WOM intentions. As such, I assessed the extent to which they felt their partner's feedback was justified. The main effect of feedback valence was significant (M_{neg} = 4.32; M_{pos} = 5.60; $F(1, 95) = 14.88$, $p <$ .0001), whereas the effect of recommendation was not (M_{self} = 5.08; M_{other} = 4.88; $F(1, 95) =$ 2.12, $p > .1$), and the interaction was marginally significant ($F(1, 95) = 2.85$, $p = .095$). However, the moderated mediation (PROCESS model 7; N = 10,000) was not significant in either the self-focus (effect = -.0134; LLCI = -.2480, ULCI = .1601) or other-focus (effect = -.0343; LLCI = -.4355, ULCI = .3427) conditions. This indicates that feeling the other person's feedback is more or less justified is not driving participants' decrease in subsequent WOM intentions after negative feedback.

Discussion

This study provides evidence that recommendation focus interacts with feedback valence to influence subsequent WOM intentions. In particular, replicating the previous experiments, those who make other-focused recommendations lower their subsequent WOM intentions after receiving negative feedback on their recommendation. This occurs because being other-focused when making a recommendation means that the experience becomes a source of the threat after receiving negative feedback, and so the recommender copes through dissociating from the experience (Ward and Broniarczyk 2011; White and Argo 2009). However, when self-focused, consumers are buffered against the threat and so the impact of negative feedback is attenuated. In the final experiment, I replicate this finding with a new product category (for generalizability) and with a new study paradigm (for robustness).

EXPERIMENT 4

Because experiment 4 introduces a new study procedure as well as a new manipulation of recommendation focus, I pretested both the main elements of the design and the recommendation focus manipulation to validate this method. The first pretest tests the validity of having participants recommend a song to another participant while also listening to the song themselves, and the second pretest tests the manipulation of recommendation focus through overlapping preferences (Ross et al. 1977; Savitsky et al. 2011; Tu et al. 2016; Walker Naylor et al. 2011).

Pretest 1: Recommend versus Share

It is important to note that WOM is not always a mere recommendation, but can also include actually engaging in the experience with the recipient of the recommendation. Many times, a person will recommend a song, movie, or even restaurant, only to then re-engage in this experience concurrently with the recipient of their recommendation. As such, in addition to looking at mere recommendations across my studies, I sought to demonstrate that these effects would hold even if the recommender re-consumes what they are recommending concurrently with the recipient. I believe this provides a stronger test for my hypotheses as it rules out the possibility these results arise due to memory errors or because the experience has changed in some manner.

In line with this, I conducted a simple pretest to compare mere recommendations versus co-consumed recommendations. This experiment was a two-level design (recommendation vs. co-consumption) with 52 undergraduate student participants (M_{age} = 20.78, SD = 2.82, 48.1% female). I predicted that participants would respond to negative feedback the same regardless of whether they merely recommended the experience, or whether they recommended it and co-consumed it concurrently with the recipient of their recommendation.

Participants came to the lab in groups and sat at a computer where they were told that they had been paired with another participant in the room. Participants then filled out various questions including their major and how they spent their time, which were used to bolster the cover story by providing participants with false feedback about their responses compared to their partner's.

They were then randomly assigned to either the "recommend" condition or the "share" condition. In both conditions, they were told that someone in the study would pick a song. In the

recommend condition, they were told that they had been assigned to the role of "recommender" and that they would select a song that only their partner would hear. In the share condition, they were told that they had been assigned to the role of "introducer" and that they would select a song that both they and their partner would listen to together (over their individual headphones at their personal computer terminals).

Following this, participants actually selected a song and were directed to a popular website at which they searched a link to that song. They "sent" the link to their ostensible partner. In the recommend condition, they then believed that their partner was listening to their recommended song while the participant listened to neutral elevator music. In the share condition, they believed that their partner was listening to their recommended song, and they also listened to their own song selection at the same time. Following this, all participants wrote their own opinion of the song and were then given false-feedback from their partner indicating that their partner did not like the song they had selected. In particular, they read "I didn't really like the song the other person picked. I normally like most kinds of music and I haven't heard that song before, but I didn't think it was all that good. Something just seemed off." All feedback in this experiment was negative.

Using the same measures from the prior experiments, I controlled for suspicion using the suspicion index as in prior experiments ($\alpha = .93$). As expected, I found no difference between the recommend versus share conditions in terms of participant's subsequent WOM intentions (M_{rec} = 5.38, M_{share} = 6.00, $t(49) = -1.10$, $p > .2$). This indicates that the impact of negative feedback on WOM does not differ in a co-consumption setting. Thus, in experiment 4, I use a co-consumed experience to provide an added layer of robustness to my findings.

Pretest 2: Preference Overlap

Experiment 4 uses preference overlap as another manipulation of recommendation focus. Preference overlap refers to whether the recommender and recipient had similar preferences in the experience category (i.e., similar tastes in music) or not. Preference overlap induces self-focus due to the increased degree of self-other overlap in the relevant product category (Ross et al. 1977; Savitsky et al. 2011; Tu et al. 2016), and because it will cause the consumer to base the recommendation on their own preferences, as there are no alternate preferences to consider. Conversely, when the recipient has different preferences, the recommender will once again be more other-focused and will take the preferences of the other person into account when making their recommendation (Barasch and Berger 2014). By not directly telling participants to base their recommendations on their own preference or the other person's, this provides a more conservative test for the role of recommendation focus in impacting subsequent WOM.

I tested this manipulation in a two-level (overlapping vs. non) pretest. This study was run in the lab on student participants (N = 125, M_{age} = 21.05, SD = 2.58, 54.1% female). I predicted that those in the overlapping condition would display greater self-focus in that they would select their own preferred options (Ross et al. 1977).

The manipulation of preference overlap was embedded into the 'get to know each other' task that participants completed. First, participants answered questions about their "consumer identity preferences" in a variety of categories, including their preferred car models, sunglasses brands, TV genres, cuisines, and most importantly, music genre (embedded in the middle of the questions). Participants were then told to imagine that were being asked to recommend a song to another student, and to imagine that they were a "strong" match with this partner overall. Those in the overlapping preference (self-focus) condition were told to imagine that they were a

"strong" match in the category of music genre, whereas those in the non-overlapping (other-focus) condition were told to imagine they were a "weak" match with their partner in the category of music preferences. Participants then answered "how likely would you be to select one of your favorite songs", "how likely would you be to select a song based on your own preferences", "how likely would you be to take your partner's preferences into account when selecting your song" (reverse-scored) and "to what extent would you try to take your partner's perspective when choosing a song" (reverse-scored) on 7-point Likert scales as an overall self-focus index ($\alpha = .71$). Participants in the overlapping condition scored significantly higher on this index ($M = 4.54$) than those in the non-overlapping condition ($M = 3.95$; $t(119) = -2.84$, $p = .005$). Thus, manipulating whether participants have the same preferences (vs. different preferences) as their partner in the category of interest heightens their self-focus when making a recommendation.

Main Study

The main goal of experiment 4 was to demonstrate the generalizability and robustness of the findings found in the previous experiments. To these ends, this study allowed participants to select and recommend any song of their own choosing (so long as the song was in English) rather than selecting from a battery of pre-selected movie trailers. Using songs demonstrates that the effect of feedback on recommendations is not specific to a given product category, and provides evidence of robustness by demonstrating that the effects hold even when participants choose an experience of their own (i.e., a song) rather than selecting from a predetermined list of experiences. Moreover, I also had participants co-consume the song with their partner in order to

demonstrate that the effects hold even when participants have the opportunity to consume what they are recommending, and even when they write their own 'feedback' about the experience.

Design and Participants

This study was a 2 (feedback: positive vs. negative) by 2 (recommendation focus: self vs. other) between-subjects design. I collected a sample of 105 student participants from the University of Alberta; however, four of these responses were incomplete. Similar to experiment 3, seven participants were excluded for guessing the nature of the cover story, leaving a final sample of 94 (M_{age} = 21.28, SD = 1.66; 60.2% female).

Procedure

This study was run in pairs in the lab. In the event that one participant was a no-show, the participant who arrived was told that their partner was set up in an adjacent room doing the same study at the same time (34 participants). Participants sat facing one another at computer terminals with headphones, with no wall obstructing their view. Similar to pretest 2, participants answered questions about their "consumer identity preferences" and were told that they were a "strong" match with their partner overall. To manipulate recommendation focus, participants read that they were a "strong" (self-focus) or "weak" (other-focus) match with their partner in the category of music preferences (see Appendix C for full details).

Following this, participants were each instructed to write down the name of a song they wanted to introduce to the other person, knowing that their partner would listen to it. They then read that the computer was randomly determining whose song they would listen to first, when in reality, all participants were told their own song was selected first. The experimenter then

directed them to a music listening website where they listened to their own song over the headphones, believing they were listening to the same song as their partner.

After the song was complete, I manipulated feedback valence in the same manner as experiment 3 and pretest 1 (i.e., via written feedback). To account for the possibility in the previous studies that participants were merely anchoring on the other person's feedback and did not have a strong opinion of their own, I had participants first write their own opinion of the song, which they believed was sent to their partner. Upon submitting their own opinion, they read false feedback (positive vs. negative) from their partner about the song (see also: Appendix B).

Finally, participants answered several measures. The dependent variable was subsequent WOM ("If the opportunity presented itself, how likely would you be to share this song with someone else who has never heard it before?" 1 = "not at all", 7 = "very likely"). I also measured the extent to which participants took the perspective of the other person ("While listening to the song, to what extent did you try to take the perspective of the other person?" 1 = "not at all, 7 = "to a great extent"). This was to rule out the alternate explanation that perspective-taking accounts for why participants in the other-focus conditions decrease their subsequent WOM after negative feedback.

Measures were also included to rule out potential alternate explanations that rely on cognitive consistency theories (i.e., cognitive dissonance [Festinger 1962]; Balance Theory [Heider 1958]). These theories posit that individuals change their attitudes in order to resolve psychological tension that arises when there is a conflict between one's behaviour versus one's attitude (cognitive dissonance) or between liking both a person and an experience if this other person dislikes the experience (Balance Theory). As such, I measured consumers' attitudes

toward the song (i.e., the extent to which they "like", "enjoy", feel "positive" toward, and feel "connected" to the song; $\alpha = .85$), after receiving the feedback from the other person.

Finally, the manipulation check ensured that participants understood the feedback about the song using a binary measure ("If you had to categorize the other person's opinion of the song, would you classify it as..." where 0 = "They enjoyed the song" and 1 = "They did not like the song"). Participants were then probed for suspicion (index $\alpha = .91$) and debriefed.

Results

The main results reported below do not change when controlling for whether participants were paired and could see each other or whether they were solo and believed their partner was in an adjacent room. As such, I do not include this factor in the analysis. As with the prior studies, I controlled for suspicion.

Manipulation Checks. Because the manipulation check measure was binary, I used a 2 (feedback: positive vs. negative) by 2 (recommendation focus: self vs. other) binary logistic regression. Results revealed that participants could accurately recall the valence of the feedback from the other person; that is, those in the negative (positive) feedback valence conditions accurately reported that the other person disliked (enjoyed) the song ($\beta = -4.79$, Wald(3) $\chi^2 = 21.08$, $p < .0001$). There was no effect of recommendation focus ($\beta = -0.32$, Wald(3) $\chi^2 = .11$, $p > .7$) nor an interaction ($\beta = -18.49$, Wald(3) $\chi^2 = .00$, $p > .9$).

Hypothesis Testing. A 2 (feedback: positive vs. negative) by 2 (recommendation focus: self vs. other) ANOVA revealed a main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 89) = 3.51$, $p = .042$),

and the main effect of recommendation focus was not significant ($F(1, 89) = 1.54$, $p > .2$). As predicted, the interaction was significant ($F(1, 89) = 9.80$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .099$). Planned contrasts revealed that when participants were other-focused (i.e., when preferences were non-overlapping), as before, those in the negative feedback condition reported being less likely to engage in subsequent WOM than those in the positive feedback condition ($M_{pos} = 6.32$; $M_{neg} = 4.78$; $t(89) = 3.53$; $p = .001$). In contrast, when self-focused (i.e., when preferences were overlapping), there was no significant difference in WOM intentions as a function of feedback valence ($M_{pos} = 5.74$; $M_{neg} = 6.04$, $t(89) = .85$; $p > .4$). Notably, the other-focus negative condition differed significantly from all other conditions (ps < .03), none of which differed from each other (ps > .1).

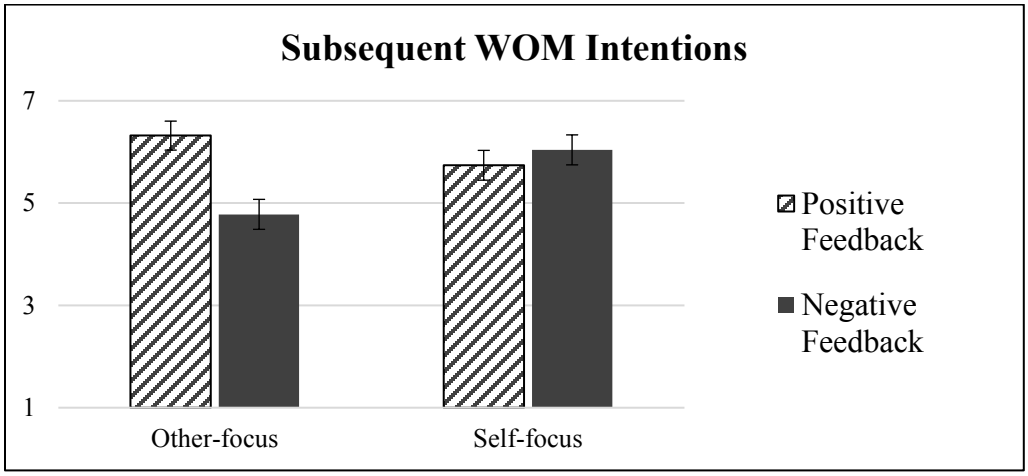

FIGURE 6. Subsequent WOM by feedback valence and recommendation focus.

Alternate Explanations. I used this study to rule out two alternate explanations for the current effects. First, I measured perspective-taking as a potential mediator that could explain why participants in the other-focus condition decrease their subsequent WOM after negative feedback. Results revealed that the main effect of feedback valence was not significant ($F(1, 89) = .83$, $p > .3$), nor was the main effect of recommendation focus ($F(1, 89) = 1.67$, $p > .2$) or the

interaction ($F(1, 89) = 1.10$, $p > .2$). Using PROCESS model 7 (Hayes 2013) and bootstrapping (N = 10,000), I found that perspective-taking did not mediate the effect in either the other-focused (effect = .0022, LLCI = -.0611, ULCI = .0884) or the self-focused conditions (effect = -.0380, LLCI = -.2021, ULCI = .0087).

Second, this study rules out the alternate explanation that cognitive-consistency theories (Festinger 1962; Heider 1958) may be driving the decrease in subsequent WOM intentions. In particular, I examined consumers' attitude toward the song as the dependent variable; results revealed that neither the main effects (feedback valence: $F(1, 89) = 1.14$; $p > .1$; recommendation focus ($F(1, 89) = .99$, $p > .3$) nor the interaction were significant ($F(1, 89) = 1.55$, $p > .2$, partial $\eta^2 = .017$). Thus, contrary to cognitive-consistency theories, consumers do not change their attitudes toward the song to resolve an internal consistency, and so these theories cannot explain the current pattern of results.

Discussion

As predicted, consumers who make recommendations with the recipient's preferences in mind respond to negative feedback on these recommendations by decreasing their subsequent WOM. Conversely, the impact of negative feedback is attenuated among consumers who make self-focused recommendations. This holds even when recommendation focus is manipulated indirectly, and when consumers recommend an experience of their own choosing, rather than selecting from a list of pre-determined experiences.

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across four experiments, I predict and find that feedback on recommendations impacts the recommender's subsequent WOM about the experience. In particular, if consumers consider the preferences of the person to whom they are recommending and receive negative feedback about their recommendation, they are less likely to continue recommending it to others, relative to if they receive positive or neutral feedback. This is because negative feedback is threatening to consumers, prompting them to dissociate from the experience and thus to stop recommending it. However, when the recommender makes a more self-focused recommendation, considering only their own preferences, this deleterious effect of negative feedback is attenuated. This is because recommending in this self-focused manners acts as a buffer against negative feedback (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010; Townsend and Sood 2012). Notably, I replicate these effects across two operationalizations of recommendation focus, and diversify these findings across two experiential product categories: movie trailers and songs.

This research provides several notable contributions to the literatures on WOM and recommendation focus. First, I contribute to work on WOM by examining WOM as a dyadic process that includes not only a recommendation but also a second stage: feedback on this recommendation. Despite work that examines the dyadic nature of WOM, such as research that examines audience size in WOM settings (Barasch and Berger 2014), little research has examined how WOM is dynamic and evolves as a conversation over time, one that impacts subsequent WOM conversations (cf. Moore and McFerran 2017). I introduce the notion of WOM feedback to the literature as an essential part of these conversations, and demonstrate that negative feedback on WOM is threatening to consumers. In highlighting the importance of feedback in WOM contexts, the current research begins to fill a gap in this literature and opens new avenues for research.

Second, I help bridge the gap between WOM research, in particular research on how WOM impacts the sharer (Barasch and Berger 2014; Moore 2012), and research on threat (Gao et al. 2009; Han et al. 2015; Kim and Rucker 2012; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011; White and Argo 2009; White et al. 2012). I find that consumers are threatened due to feedback on their WOM, which has important implications for researchers who have tended to study WOM only from the side of the sharer (Cheema and Kaikati 2010; Berger 2014; Berger and Milkman 2012) or the recipient (Hamilton et al. 2014; He and Bond 2015; Packard et al. 2016).

Third, I contribute to research on recommendation focus and that on threat by demonstrating that recommendation focus can act as a moderator for how consumers respond to negative feedback. In particular, I find that consumers who are self-focused when making a recommendation are buffered against the impact of negative feedback, whereas consumers who are other-focused when making their recommendation are not, and instead cope with the threat arising from this feedback through dissociating from the experience. In doing so, I provide a situational factor (i.e., self-focus) that buffers consumers against threat (Kim and Rucker 2010; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010; Townsend and Sood 2012). This has potential implications for other contexts involving threat and begins to fill an important gap in our understanding of how consumers protect the self against threat.

Finally, I also provide a methodological contribution in that I put forward two new methods for operationalizing recommendation focus in WOM contexts. Specifically, I manipulate 1) whether the recommender bases their recommendation on their own (self-focus) versus the other person's (other-focus) preferences, and 2) whether the recommender and recipient have shared preferences in the relevant experience category (self-focus) or do not

(other-focus). The latter manipulation builds from work on social closeness, similarity, and egocentrism (Ross et al. 1977; Savitsky et al. 2011; Tu et al. 2016). In validating these manipulations of recommendation focus, I extend our understanding of factors that give rise to being self- versus other-focused when making recommendations.

Limitations

The main limitations of this work lie in the measurement of the constructs. First, this study examines consumers' subsequent WOM intentions, but does not employ a behavioural measure in any of the four experiments. Subsequent research should seek to ameliorate this limitation by examining participants' actual WOM behaviour subsequent to receiving feedback. This could be done in a variety of ways. For instance, one means of capturing real behaviour could be to have participants ostensibly paired up with a second person at the end of the study to make a second recommendation, and I could assess whether they recommend the same experience or a different one to this second participant. Another way of capturing behavioural outcomes could occur through the use of a longitudinal study, such that participants could recommend a song in the lab and receive negative or positive feedback on it, then come back to the lab a week after the initial study and respond to questions about whether they had recommended that song again or discussed it with others during the week.

Second, another measurement limitation is the use of a single-item measure for the main dependent variable of subsequent WOM. Notably, although not the standard convention, methodological research highlights that single-item measures are often reliable and have degree of strong predictive validity, often on par with multi-item measures (Bergkvist and Rossiter 2007). Moreover, Fuchs and Diamantopoulos (2009) provide guidelines for determining whether

a single item or a multi-item scale is more appropriate. For using a single item measure, these guidelines include: studying a construct that is concrete (versus abstract); where the existing instruments in the field have a high degree of semantic redundancy; where the objective of the research is to examine the construct in a general way (versus examining a specific element of it); where different populations are sampled; and where the sample size is limited. Given these guidelines, knowing that WOM intentions are relatively concrete, and that other measures in the field display semantic redundancy (Moore 2012), it is appropriate to have used a single-item measure of subsequent WOM intentions. However, future research may want to examine a greater degree of nuance in the construct of subsequent WOM, and as such may want to use a multi-item measure to account for the limitations of the current measure.

Finally, a third limitation of this work is that I only provide limited evidence of the underlying process of threat. In particular, I demonstrate the underlying process through moderation (Spencer et al. 2005), specifically through the use of a self-affirmation task (Steele 1988). This is because affirmation theory (Steele 1988) suggests that affirming a consumer in this way can protect the integrity of one's self-concept and will thus bolster them from needing to cope with threat through other means. This method also builds from a great deal of research that uses a self-affirmation task to mitigate the impact of threat (e.g., Argo and Dahl 2018; Argo and White 2009; Crocker et al. 2008; Sivanathan and Pettit 2010). However, while the use of a self-affirmation task provides some evidence of threat as the process (Sherman and Cohen 2006, p. 6, 8, 9, 11), subsequent studies should attempt to provide greater evidence. For instance, subsequent studies may attempt to measure threat directly. This may be done either through proxy measures—for example, by measuring anxiety (Osborne 2001) or fear and insecurity (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010)—or more directly by asking participants how threatened they feel

(White et al. 2012). While I do not expect participants in the present research to consciously endorse feeling threatened in response to negative feedback on a recommendation, as 'threat' is a word consumers may relate more with physical danger, it seems likely that consumers should feel more insecure in response to this feedback (Sivanathan and Pettit 2010). Another means of providing evidence of threat may be to examine conditions under which other-focused consumers may overcome the threat, such as providing them with a financial incentive for doing so. Similarly, self-focused consumers may respond in a threatened manner to negative feedback if this negative feedback becomes costly to them. As such, future research should examine the underlying process of threat through other moderators.

Future Research Directions

The current work provides many new directions for research. In the current work I find that feedback valence impacts subsequent WOM; however, future research may find other outcomes of positive and negative feedback useful to explore. For instance, does another person liking or disliking one's recommendation result in a different attitude toward that other person, creating a strain in the relationship? When would this be the case, and would it be moderated by the recommender's focus when engaging in WOM? Similarly, future research should explore the impact of positive versus negative feedback in more depth. For example, what happens when there are multiple sources of feedback, and there is a mix of positive and negative feedback? Is the effect additive, or does negative feedback loom larger than positive? Moreover, does the impact of feedback differ depending on whether this feedback has been solicited by the recommender or not? One might expect that solicited recommendations are inherently other-

focused and tailored to the recipient, and as such, (negative) feedback on these recommendations may have a stronger impact on recommendations than feedback on unsolicited recommendations.

Further, in the present research, I explored recommendation focus and feedback valence as characteristics of a recommender and audience in a given recommendation context. However, future research should examine several other different characteristics of the recommender and recipient, such as whether the recommender is an expert and the recipient is a novice, or vice versa. For example, does an expert still experience threat after receiving negative feedback from a novice on a recommendation, or is it possible that negative feedback from someone with less expertise is even more threatening, as this person 'should' follow the opinion of the expert? It seems possible that an expert recommending to a novice and receiving negative feedback may even lead to increased subsequent WOM, given that the expert may aim to counteract the novice's opinion or bolster their own through increased recommending.

Similarly, future research in this area could examine factors such as social closeness between the recommender and recipient (Dubois et al. 2017), as this factor may interact with feedback valence in determining subsequent WOM. To the extent that consumers are more egocentric (i.e., more self-focused) with close social others (Savitsky et al. 2011), recommending to particularly close friends or family could help them maintain their subsequent WOM intentions in the face of negative feedback. Indeed, these effects may be moderated by who the target of the recommendation is specifically, such as a close friend or spouse or co-worker, and future research should examine these interpersonal elements to disentangle when and how these effects change across different recommendation recipients.

Moreover, subsequent research could examine the impact of what is being recommended. For example, while the present research examines consumers recommending positive, hedonic

experiences (movie trailers and songs), some experiences may be more socially risky to recommend (e.g., a fortune-telling teashop). If a consumer recommends something that is socially risky, will the impact of feedback valence differ? In particular, if the recommender receives positive feedback, will this increase their subsequent WOM intentions over-and-above receiving neutral or no-feedback? Similarly, young consumers define their self-concept more through extraordinary experiences than ordinary ones (Bhattacharjee and Mogilner 2014). As such, if they receive negative feedback on an extraordinary experience they have recommended, will they still cope through dissociating from the experience, or will they be more motivated to cope through associative means (White et al. 2012), in order to protect these experiences and thus the self? Future work could also explore if these effects hold when the experience being recommended is a special experience. Consumers are motivated to 'protect' special memories (Zauberman, Ratner, and Kim 2009) and as such may demonstrate a desire to protect the experience after negative feedback, potentially increasing their preference for it or increasing their desire to return to it to cope with the threat.

Future research could also examine whether the impact of feedback valence on WOM functions the same for material versus experiential purchases (Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). Although this research examined experiential purchases because they are more defining of the self (Carter and Gilovich 2012), it is likely that these results will hold in examining certain types of material purchases. In particular, it is likely that negative feedback will impact subsequent recommendations for symbolic products or products that are publicly consumed, but not for products that are not symbolic (Berger and Heath 2007). For instance, clothing items are more symbolic than dishwashers, as these items help to represent the self. Given their relation to the self, these items are likely to be impacted by the threat arising from negative feedback about

these possessions. Future research should also examine if consumers merely stop recommending these possessions to others, or if they go so far as to diverge from or dispose of these items as part of this dissociation process (Berger and Heath 2007; White and Argo 2011).

Beyond feedback, researchers may wish to investigate other outcomes that are impacted by self- and other-focus. In the present research, I found that self-focus was sufficient in buffering the self against threat. Further research should be done to examine this buffering effect in other contexts, such as receiving negative feedback about one's social group (White et al. 2012) or when receiving threatening social comparison information (Argo, White, and Dahl 2006). Future research should also explore self- and other-focus in other aspects relating to WOM, especially given that consumers can be strategic when selecting WOM targets (Chen and Kirmani 2015). Research outside of recommendations may also examine self- and other-focus to understand how consumers make choices in joint consumption settings.

Finally, research should also examine other mechanisms through which feedback impacts subsequent WOM, and under which conditions these different mechanisms arise. For instance, the present research examines recommendations made on taste and preferences (i.e., for songs and trailers); however, consumers may also make recommendations based on objective facts about the world, such as recommending a person to a given job because of the salary associated with it and not because of preference or desirability of the work. If they receive negative feedback on this recommendation (e.g., the other person finds this career very distasteful), will this still be threatening to the recommender? It seems possible that under these circumstances, this feedback would not be threatening to them, given that their original recommendation was not based on taste. Future research should explore the downstream consequences of recommendations based on what type of recommendation is being made and what the motive for

that recommendation is, as different types of recommendations may lead to different responses on behalf of recommenders after receiving feedback.

Conclusion

In sum, this research provides insight into what happens when a consumer makes a recommendation and receives feedback on what they have shared with another person. I find that when the consumer recommends an experience while taking another person's preferences into account and receives negative feedback, this has deleterious consequences for their subsequent WOM for this experience. In order for a recommender to not be influenced by the feedback of others, being self-focused in their recommendations is ideal.

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APPENDIX A

"GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER" TASK FOR EXPERIMENTS 1 AND 4

Get to know each other script and questions:

> In this section, you and your partner will receive lists of questions to ask one another, back and forth. You will ask a question of them, answer their question, and read their answer to your own.
>
> These questions are about consumer preferences and identities, such as how you dress and style yourself, and the sides of yourself you show to the world.
>
> Please take your time answering the questions as they pertain to your identity.

[Page Break]

Pick a question to ask your partner:

- what is your favorite animal
- what is your favorite fruit
- what was your favorite subject in school

[Page Break]

Write your answer to this question from your partner:
Who is your favorite musical artist / band:

[Page Break]

[If "what is your favorite animal" is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite animal" with: cheetah

[If "what is your favorite fruit" is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite fruit" with: maybe bananas

[If "what was your favorite subject in school" is selected]
Your partner answered "what was your favorite subject in school" with: sciences

[Page Break]

Pick a question to ask your partner:

- what is your favorite type of weather
- what is your favorite time of day
- what is your favorite season

[Page Break]

Write your answer to this question from your partner:
What is your favorite type of food:

[Page Break]

[If “what is your favorite type of weather” is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite type of weather" with: sunny outside but not too hot

[If “what is your favorite time of day” is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite time of day" with: evening or sundown

[If “what is your favorite season” is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite season" with: summer

[Page Break]

Pick a question to ask your partner:

- what is your favorite type of shoe
- what is your favorite color
- what is your favorite thing to drink

[Page Break]

Write your answer to this question from your partner:
What is your favorite type/model of car:

[Page Break]

[If “what is your favorite type of weather” is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite type of shoe" with: running shoes

[If “what is your favorite time of day” is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite color" with: blue

[If “what is your favorite season” is selected]
Your partner answered "what is your favorite thing to drink" with: probably coffee, maybe juice

APPENDIX B

FEEDBACK VALENCE MANIPULATIONS

1) Rating Scales

Negative feedback

Your partner has now finished watching the trailer **you** selected.

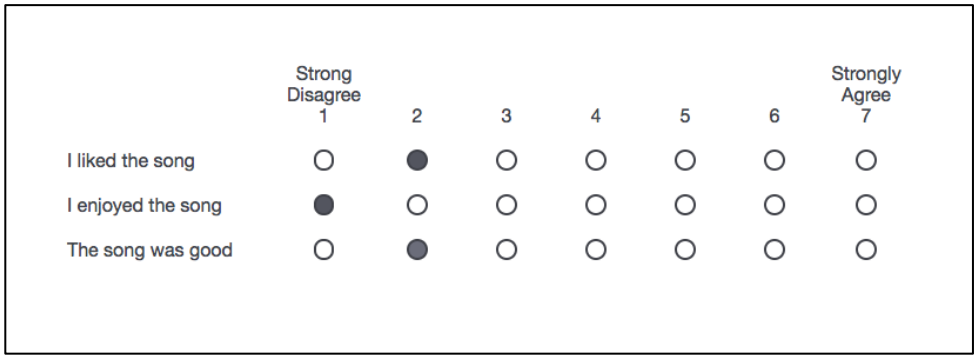
Your partner has been instructed to provide feedback on the trailer you selected. This may take a moment. Please click 'next' and the system will retrieve the feedback once it has been submitted.

[page break]

Please wait while we retrieve the responses from your partner.

[page break]

Below are your partner's thoughts about the trailer you recommended:



Your partner's rating was an average of 1.66

Positive feedback

liked = 6, enjoyed = 7, was good = 6

Your partner's rating was an average of 6.33

Neutral feedback

liked = 4, enjoyed = 3, was good = 5

Your partner's rating was an average of 4.00

No feedback control

did not see any feedback from their partner

2) **Verbal feedback**

Negative

Movie trailers: I didn't really like the trailer the other person picked. I normally like most kinds of movies and I haven't seen that trailer before, but I didn't think it was all that good. It doesn't seem worth seeing.

Songs: I really didn't like the song the other person picked for this session. Even though I normally like that style of music, I had never heard that song before, and didn't think it was all that good. The flow just seemed off.

Positive

Movie trailers: I really liked the trailer the other person picked. I normally like most kinds of movies and I haven't seen that trailer before, and I think it was pretty good. It seems worth seeing.

Songs: I really liked the song the other person picked for this session. Even though I normally like that style of music, I had never heard that song before, and I think it was pretty good. The flow just seemed to work for it.

APPENDIX C

RECOMMENDATION FOCUS MANIPULATIONS

1) Sharing motive

Self-focus

> You have been selected to recommend a move trailer to your partner.
>
> **You and your partner have watched different movie trailers so far, so the one you select will be new to them.**
>
> Please select your **personal favourite** from the trailers you watched in this session to recommend to your partner. **Pick the one you liked the most.**

Other-focus

> You have been selected to recommend a move trailer to your partner.
>
> **You and your partner have watched different movie trailers so far, so the one you select will be new to them.**
>
> Please select the one you think will be **your partner's favorite** from the trailers you watched in this session to recommend to your partner. **Pick the one you believe they will like the most.**

2) Preference Overlap

Self-focus (Overlapping)

> Our system tells us that you are **highly** similar to the other participant in your consumer identities!
>
> Categories in which you were a **strong** match include:
>
> - Music genre
> - TV show
> - Sunglasses brands

Categories in which you were a **weak** match include:

- Cuisine
- Car models

[Page break]

Now you and the other participant will have an opportunity to introduce something from one of these categories to one another.

The category selected for this session is: **music**
This category was a: **strong match**

Other-focus (Non-overlapping)

Our system tells us that you are **highly** similar to the other participant in your consumer identities!

Categories in which you were a **strong** match include:

- Cuisine
- TV show
- Sunglasses brands

Categories in which you were a **weak** match include:

- Music Genre
- Car models

Followed by (both conditions):

Please think of a song from a musical artist that you want to introduce to the other participant. Please take a moment to select this artist, as you will be listening to the song that you select in just a moment.

Please select an artist with English songs, and a song in English.

What is the name of the musical artist: _____
(please type the name carefully)

What song from this artist would you like to introduce to the other participant in the session: _____
(please type the song title carefully)

APPENDIX D

Supplementary Data Analyses

I controlled for suspicion in all of my experiments. This was because participants were deceived into believing they were paired up with another person, and knowing this person was not real could reasonably impact their responses to questions (Wilson, Aronson, and Carlsmith 2010). Indeed, it is possible that if participants knew the feedback was false, they would not feel threatened by it. As a robustness check I reran my analyses without including the suspicion index. Furthermore, I similarly reran my analyses without including either suspicion *or* the dummy variables for the movie trailers used in experiments 1, 2, and 3, to provide evidence that the current effects are robust to whether I control for the individual choice made by participants in these studies.

Reported below are the outputs for each experiment. Presented first is the output for the main analysis including the control variables, followed by the analysis without the suspicion index, and then by the analysis without the dummy variables for movie trailer, where applicable.

EXPERIMENT 1 OUTPUTS

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	6	2.434	.026	.047
Intercept	1	409.855	.000	.583
Suspicion Index	1	.155	.695	.001
Movie dummy 1	1	2.353	.126	.008
Movie dummy 2	1	1.789	.182	.006
Feedback Valence	3	3.682	.012	.036

Table A1. Experiment 1 full output, df = 293.

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	5	2.899	.014	.047
Intercept	1	1302.509	.000	.816
Movie dummy 1	1	2.350	.126	.008
Movie dummy 2	1	1.792	.182	.006
Feedback Valence	3	3.821	.010	.038

Table A2. Experiment 1 output minus suspicion index, df = 294.

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	3	3.821	.010	.037
Intercept	1	2850.210	.000	.906
Feedback Valence	3	3.821	.010	.037

Table A3. Experiment 1 clean output, df = 296.

EXPERIMENT 2 OUTPUTS

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	8	7.761	.000	.125
Intercept	1	296.061	.000	.405
Suspicion Index	1	22.134	.000	.048
Movie dummy 1	1	.108	.743	.000
Movie dummy 2	1	1.639	.201	.004
Feedback Valence	1	10.691	.001	.024
Affirmation	2	.022	.978	.000
Feedback * Affirmation	2	3.011	.050	.014

Table A4. Experiment 2 full output, df = 435.

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	7	5.444	.000	.080
Intercept	1	1471.970	.000	.771
Movie dummy 1	1	.012	.912	.000
Movie dummy 2	1	2.139	.144	.005
Feedback Valence	1	27.948	.000	.060
Affirmation	2	.049	.953	.000
Feedback * Affirmation	2	3.439	.033	.016

Table A5. Experiment 2 output minus suspicion index, df = 436.

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	5	7.050	.000	.074
Intercept	1	4414.074	.000	.910
Feedback Valence	1	28.686	.000	.061
Affirmation	2	.048	.953	.000
Feedback * Affirmation	2	3.523	.030	.016

Table A6. Experiment 2 clean output, df = 438.

EXPERIMENT 3 OUTPUTS

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	7	3.719	.001	.215
Intercept	1	72.104	.000	.431
Movie dummy 1	1	1.791	.184	.019
Movie dummy 2	1	2.842	.095	.029
Movie dummy 3	1	.201	.655	.002
Suspicion Index	1	.053	.818	.001
Feedback Valence	1	7.809	.006	.076
Recommendation Focus	1	7.562	.007	.074
Feedback * Focus	1	4.062	.047	.041

Table A7. Experiment 3 full output, df = 95.

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	6	4.373	.001	.215
Intercept	1	388.144	.000	.802
Movie dummy 1	1	1.803	.183	.018
Movie dummy 2	1	2.817	.097	.029
Movie dummy 3	1	.197	.658	.002
Feedback Valence	1	8.585	.004	.082
Recommendation Focus	1	7.583	.007	.073
Feedback * Focus	1	4.062	.047	.041

Table A8. Experiment 3 output minus suspicion index, df = 96.

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	3	6.457	.000	.164
Intercept	1	1140.752	.000	.920
Feedback Valence	1	10.619	.002	.097
Recommendation Focus	1	6.613	.012	.063
Feedback * Focus	1	3.065	.083	.030

Table A9. Experiment 3 clean output, df = 99.

EXPERIMENT 4 OUTPUTS

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	4	4.297	.003	.162
Intercept	1	98.747	.000	.526
Suspicion Index	1	.922	.340	.010
Feedback Valence	1	3.506	.064	.038
Recommendation Focus	1	1.537	.218	.017
Feedback * Focus	1	9.799	.002	.099

Table A10. Experiment 4 full output, df = 89.

Source	df	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Model	3	5.495	.002	.151
Intercept	1	1637.151	.000	.946
Feedback Valence	1	5.765	.018	.058
Recommendation Focus	1	1.054	.307	.011
Feedback * Focus	1	9.855	.002	.096

Table A11. Experiment 4 output minus suspicion / clean output, df = 93.