Word-of Mouth Transmission in Settings with Multiple Opinions: The Impact of Other Opinions on WOM Intention and Strength

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Abstract

In two experiments we examine word-of-mouth (WOM) in multiple opinion settings. In Study 1, we find that (generally) the presence of congruent other opinions tended to increase the likelihood and strength of WOM compared to a situation when there was no other opinion. In addition, incongruent other opinions also have a tendency to increase WOM likelihood, but reduced strength compared to when no other opinions were present. Further, we find that consumer’s level of satisfaction and strength of social tie to the recipient moderated the effect of opinion congruence. In Study 2, we generally replicate the results in Study 1 in a different context and also examine the impact of consumer-brand relationship quality (BRQ). We find that participants with low BRQ increased WOM likelihood and reduced WOM strength, whereas those with high BRQ were less susceptible to other opinions. Theoretical and managerial implications of the study’s findings are discussed.
Word-of-Mouth Transmission in Settings with Multiple Opinions:
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Imagine a small group of friends having lunch together. Their conversation ebbs and flows, and not surprisingly, includes a discussion of restaurants. One friend talks about the great food and atmosphere at a particular restaurant, and finishes by saying that her friends should check it out. If another friend at lunch had been to the same restaurant, several interesting questions arise: Will she also talk about her experience with the restaurant? How strongly if she does so? Will it make any difference if her experience was the same as or opposite to that of her friend? Would she behave differently if the group members were just casual acquaintances rather than close friends? In this paper, we attempt to address these questions.

Word-of-mouth (WOM) has received continuous attention from marketing scholars since the seminal work of Katz and Lazarsfeld’s *Personal Influence* (1955). In a number of studies, scholars have attempted to identify the factors that affect the occurrence of WOM. Examples include the work that examines the relationship between customer satisfaction and WOM (e.g., Anderson 1998), and a variety of attempts to identify the major constituents involved in WOM (e.g., opinion leaders, market mavens -- Feick and Price 1987). Despite the wealth of accumulated work on WOM over the years, the focus has predominantly been limited to a dyad context: that is, two consumers, a communicator and a recipient, interacting with each other in sending and receiving WOM. In life, consumers engage in WOM as part of natural interactions that can involve multiple individuals and multiple viewpoints.

We propose that the dynamics of WOM in a multiple-person setting is different from those in a dyad context. First, it has been demonstrated that the mere presence of other
individuals has a significant impact on consumers’ choices (Dahl, Manchanda, and Argo 2001) and helping behavior (Latané and Wolf 1981). Second, social relationships have been shown to play an important role in understanding WOM phenomena (Brown and Reingen 1987). For instance, situating a consumer in a group setting (as opposed to a dyad) expands and complicates social relations. Also, in a group setting, it is quite possible that there will be multiple consumers who have had experiences with a given product or service. Existing WOM research provides little guidance about how consumers will react in such situations.

Studying WOM in a multiple person setting is particularly relevant for services. In general, since services are characterized by intangibility, low comparability, few search attributes, and high perceived risk, consumers tend to rely heavily on WOM in their evaluations (Bristor 1990; Murray and Schlacter 1990). Moreover, intangibility and greater number of experience/credence attributes of services are likely to lead different consumers to develop different or heterogeneous impressions about a given service experience (Feick and Higie 1992; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). Thus, it should be typical that in a group setting, individuals will encounter other consumers who have different opinions from them about the same service.

The primary objective of our paper is to examine how the presence of congruent or incongruent other opinions will influence WOM—in particular, the intention to engage in WOM communication and the strength of recommendation. We examine the impact of multiple opinions in two experiments and propose three factors that moderate the impact of multiple opinions: (i) valence - whether a consumer is satisfied or dissatisfied with the service (Study 1); (ii) tie strength - whether the sender is connected to the recipient of WOM as a strong or weak tie.
(Study 1 and 2); and (iii) BRQ – whether a consumer has a high or low level of brand relationship quality (Study 2).

Theoretical Background

Influence of Others

The effect of group dynamics and others’ influence on individuals’ behavior has been extensively studied in social psychology and marketing. In general, the research findings suggest that individuals have a tendency to behave in accordance with group or social norms, and behave negatively toward opinion that deviates (Asch 1955; Schachter 1951). In their work on the mechanism of social influence, Deutsch and Gerard (1955) developed the distinction between normative and informational social influence. Normative influence is the pressure to conform to the expectations of others, i.e., social norms, whereas informational influence occurs when an individual accepts the persuasive argument(s) of others.

In the marketing literature, social or group influence has been applied widely. For example, scholars often have relied on social influence as a theoretical basis for studying the roles that WOM plays in consumers’ adoption patterns of new products or services (Arndt 1967; Gatignon and Robertson 1985). Furthermore, the ideas have been applied to reference group influence in the choice of products and brands (Bearden and Etzel 1982), and the prevalence of social desirability bias found in self-report measures (Fisher 2000; Paulhus 1991). Whether it is a social or marketing context, the common theme is that individuals are susceptible to social influence, and they often tend to behave in ways that conform to social norms or pressure.

However, some scholars have argued that in some contexts, consumers can behave in ways opposite to what the social conformity theory would stipulate (Brewer 1991). One
explanation is that consumers have a desire to feel independent, unique, and differentiated from others, which occasionally results in the purchase of unique or scarce products (Fromkin and Snyder 1980; Snyder 1992; Snyder and Fromkin 1977). More recently, Ariely and Levav (2000) illustrate that consumers’ choices were consistent with variety-seeking rather than group uniformity when they made a sequential choice in a group setting (e.g., ordering a meal in a restaurant after another person has already ordered). The authors proposed that the task affects the weights consumers placed on various goals, and that this goal-balancing process, in turn, determines choice outcomes reflecting either uniformity or variety among group members. We expect that this goal-balancing process will operate when consumers decide whether and how to engage in WOM in the presence of others’ opinions.

Development of Hypotheses

Other Opinions and Word-of-Mouth Transmission

Consider the case of an individual who hears another person’s opinion about a product and then must decide whether or not to express his or her own opinion. If the other person’s opinion is congruent with his or her own, the prediction is rather straightforward: consumers are likely to show stronger intention to engage in WOM compared to a situation where no other opinion is present. That is, expressing opinions that are congruent with those of another person who is present is consistent with the social conformity principle, which is instrumental in achieving the group goal of social consensus (Moscovici 1985). It also seems to be consistent with informational social influence. That is, if another person gives an opinion consistent with that of my own, I am more likely to also give my opinion since I would have greater confidence in my own opinion as a result (Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975).
On the other hand, when a consumer’s opinion is incongruent with the one already expressed, predictions become somewhat more complicated. First of all, social conformity suggests that the consumer is less likely to engage in WOM (than they would otherwise, if no other opinion had been expressed) since the resulting opinion deviance would reduce group conformity. That is, not expressing an opinion (i.e., not engaging in WOM) lets the consumer avoid potential conflicts or negative perceptions that may arise from being the source of inconsistent opinion in the group. It is also possible, however, that the consumer’s desire or need for uniqueness and independence may compel him/her to engage in WOM more strongly when faced with an incongruent other opinion.

As suggested in the goal-balancing process (Ariely and Levav 2000), we propose that a consumer’s WOM will be determined by whichever of the two motives, *social conformity* and *need for uniqueness*, with greater salience or receiving higher weighting in a specific WOM situation. In addition, we hypothesize that the goal-balancing process can affect WOM outcome variables differently.

Consider WOM likelihood and WOM strength. In a situation where a consumer’s opinion is incongruent with the ones previously stated, WOM likelihood may be unaffected, though the comments may be weaker than they would have been had the opinion been congruent or not given at all. By making the trade-off, the consumer will be able to reduce the risk of potential conflicts or negative perceptions potentially created by being the source of deviance in a group. This line of reasoning is supported by research finding that communicators modify their message by considering listener characteristics such as attitudes or expectations about a topic (Blumberg 1972). Thus, we expect that the strength of recommendation should be reduced when consumers are exposed to incongruent other opinions.
On the other hand, congruent other opinions are expected to reinforce the evaluations of the individual, thereby leading to stronger recommendations being made to others. Overall, these expectations are based on the notion that the presence of congruent opinions positively reinforces or validates an individual’s opinion while dissimilar or incongruent ones negatively reinforces or invalidates it (Newtson and Czerlinsky 1974). However, as WOM phenomenon is inherently premised on the message provider communicating his/her personal experience to the recipient, examining the impact of other opinions in the larger context of social relationship and satisfaction experienced is further warranted. The subsequent sections address this very issue.

The Role of Tie Strength

We propose that the social relationship between WOM senders and recipients will have an impact on the likelihood and strength of WOM. In the WOM literature, social relationships have often been operationalized as tie strength, and scholars have made the distinction between strong ties (e.g. family members and close friends) and weak ties (e.g., casual acquaintances and strangers)—generally determined by the extent of time, emotional closeness, intimacy, and reciprocity of the relationship. Relatedly, social psychologists have made a distinction between exchange and communal relationships based on the orientation held by individuals toward the other party (Clark 1984). Individuals typically have exchange relationships with weak ties, in which members do not feel any special responsibility for one another beyond that felt for any other human being (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993). In contrast, people typically have communal relationships with strong ties, in which members have a general obligation to be concerned about the other’s welfare, so they render benefit in response to the other’s needs or to demonstrate concern for the other member.
Even though Granovetter (1973) discovered that weak ties play a crucial role in the flow of information across groups, research suggests that strong ties are more likely to be called on for information and that such information is likely to be more influential than if obtained from weak ties (Reingen and Kernan 1986; Brown and Reingen 1987). Moreover, Frenzen and Nakamoto (1993) found that for strong ties, consumers were likely to transmit information regardless of its value. In contrast, for weak ties, as its value increased, consumers were less likely to transmit information.

Applying these findings to our context of multiple sources, we expect consumers to engage in WOM regardless of the presence or congruency of other opinions when interacting with strong ties. For strong ties, an altruistic motive would be most salient to the communicator, making him/her strongly motivated to share information that will provide benefit to the strong tie, e.g., help him make better decisions. In addition, according to Festinger’s (1954) social comparison theory, people constantly attempt to check reality by exchanging views with their reference groups (i.e., strong ties). Thus, strong ties would be less conscious of the presence of other opinions, even incongruent ones, and be more likely to express true evaluations to each other.

In contrast, different motives should be salient when interacting with weak ties. Altruism will be less important and self-presentation more so. In fact, Tice et al. (1995) found that systematic differences in self-presentation are present when the interaction partner of an individual was a friend (i.e., strong tie) or a stranger (i.e., weak tie). Individuals had greater motivation to present themselves in a positive manner toward strangers than to friends. With weak ties, individuals are more concerned about impression management.
For weak ties with congruent other opinions, engaging in WOM will reflect positively on the communicator by giving an impression of conforming to other opinions. Thus for weak ties, consumers are more likely to engage in WOM and have stronger opinions in the presence of congruent other opinions compared to the baseline. For incongruent other opinions, social conformity suggests that engaging in WOM will reflect negatively on the consumer since their opinion deviates from that given by the speaker. However, social conformity matters less than impression management in the case of weak ties. One way to evoke a good impression may be to present oneself in a unique and independent manner by sharing opinions that are incongruent with others. With incongruent other opinions, weak ties are also more likely to engage in WOM (compared to the baseline condition), but are likely to make a weaker recommendation as a means of compensating for their deviating behavior. Thus, the following interaction hypotheses are posited. Note that all hypotheses with an ‘a’ suffix refer to WOM transmission likelihood and with a ‘b’ suffix to strength of recommendation.

H1a: For strong ties, the presence or absence of other opinions will not affect WOM intention; for weak ties, the presence of either a congruent or incongruent other opinion will increase WOM intention (compared to the baseline of no other opinion).

H1b: For strong ties, the presence or absence of other opinions will not affect strength of recommendation; for weak ties, the presence of a congruent other opinion will increase the strength of recommendation (compared to baseline) while the presence of an incongruent other opinion will decrease strength of opinion.
The Role of Consumer Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

It was suggested earlier that compared to a baseline of no other opinion, the presence of other opinions is likely to increase consumers’ intention to engage in WOM. However, we expect this effect to be moderated by consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Engaging in negative WOM can be linked to the “MUM” effect in psychology: people are reluctant to transmit negative news because it involves various psychological costs (see Tesser and Rosen 1975 for a review). One such cost is the fear-of-negative evaluation, i.e., people often believe that communicating bad news is more likely to lead the recipient to view the communicator in a less positive light than communicating good news (Rosen and Tesser 1972). However, if someone else has already transmitted (e.g., negative) experiences, consumers are likely to be less susceptible to the MUM effect -- observing another consumer giving opinions relieves the suppressed motive to engage in negative WOM to a greater degree than positive WOM. Thus, it is predicted that the presence of other opinions will increase WOM likelihood more for dissatisfied than satisfied customers compared to when there is no other opinion.

We expect a different mechanism to operate for strength of recommendations. For a number of reasons, dissatisfied consumers are likely to show stronger opinions than satisfied consumers. First, dissatisfaction judgments tend to be perceived as more diagnostic than satisfaction judgments (Herr, Kardes, and Kim 1991). Second, individuals give more weight to negative information than positive information across various dimensions of behavior (Skowronski and Carlston 1987). Lastly, Klayman and Ha (1987) suggest that a false positive “buy” error is more painful than a false negative “no buy” error. Thus, when they engage in WOM, the higher degree of subjective validity that consumers would perceive when dissatisfied (vs. satisfied) should mean the strength of their recommendations is less influenced by the
presence of other opinions: either congruent or incongruent (Gerard 1954). Therefore, we make the following predictions concerning the impact of satisfaction:

H2a: The presence of either a congruent or incongruent other opinion will increase WOM intention to a greater extent for dissatisfied than satisfied consumers (compared to the baseline of no other opinion).

H2b: The presence of a congruent other opinion will increase the strength of recommendation to a greater extent for satisfied than dissatisfied consumers (compared to the baseline of no other opinion), while the presence of an incongruent other opinion will decrease strength of opinion to a greater extent for satisfied than dissatisfied consumers.

Study 1

Method

Design and Subjects. Three hundred ninety-five undergraduate students at a large public university participated in a 3 x 2 x 2 between-subjects design for course credit. The independent variables included congruency of other opinions (baseline: no other opinion expressed; congruent; incongruent), satisfaction (satisfied, dissatisfied), and tie strength (strong, weak). Participants were randomly assigned to the twelve experimental conditions. The experiment was conducted in small groups of about twenty participants.

Experimental Stimuli. The research context is set around a visit to a restaurant, for such experiences are frequent topics of WOM, as well as having relevance and familiarity to student
participants. The independent variables—satisfaction level, congruency of other opinions (i.e., WOM) and tie strength—were manipulated in the two related scenarios.

First, participants were given a one-page scenario\(^1\) in which they were asked to project themselves as a person who had visited a fictitious Italian restaurant. The scenario describes service experience in terms of the ambience of the restaurant, quality of food served, and level of customer service. These aspects were manipulated to achieve the two levels of satisfaction (i.e., satisfied and dissatisfied) with the restaurant experience.

In the second scenario, presented immediately after the first, participants were asked to imagine that they went out for coffee with a close friend. The friend and the participant then ran into either another close friend of her/his (i.e., strong tie) or a classmate of her/his friend that s/he had heard of before (i.e., weak tie). Since the role of social relation between communicator and recipient on WOM dynamics is a key premise of the study, we focus on manipulating the tie strength between the participant (WOM communicator) and the recipient—while holding constant the tie strength between the third person and the participant (as a close friend). The scenario depicts three individuals having coffee together and engaging in a conversation. The recipient asks if his/her colleagues would recommend a restaurant for celebrating a birthday dinner, and the participant’s close friend first provides his/her opinions about a restaurant. The restaurant was the same one as the participant had visited in Scenario 1. The friend’s opinions were either congruent or incongruent with that of the participant’s; also a baseline condition of no opinion offered by the friend was assessed. The experimental condition was deemed congruent (vs. incongruent) when the close friend’s opinions offered in Scenario 2 and the

\(^1\) Scenario administered to the participants was gender-specific to correspond with the gender of individuals depicted in the scenario (see Appendix A for Scenario 1).
participant’s experience described in Scenario 1 were either both satisfied or both dissatisfied (vs. one satisfied and the other dissatisfied) (see Appendix B for Scenario 2).

**Measures.** We included two dependent measures. First, participants’ intention to engage in WOM was measured by asking them to state how likely they would tell others about their experience at the restaurant using a scale of 0 (“definitely would not tell”) to 100 (“definitely would tell”; Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993). Second, the strength of recommendations was measured by asking participants to state how strongly they would recommend the person to try the restaurant if they tell her/him about it, using a two-item seven-point scale (“strongly recommend not to go – strongly recommend to go,” and “negatively warn – positively recommend”).

Manipulation checks for satisfaction and dissatisfaction asked participants to rate their overall feelings toward the experience at the restaurant on three eleven-point (-5 to +5) semantic differential scales (“dissatisfied/ satisfied,” “displeased/ pleased,” “unfavorable/ favorable”; Crosby and Stephens 1987). The perception of tie strength was measured using a four-item scale, each of which indicates closeness, intimacy, support, and association (Frenzen and Davis 1990, see Appendix C for the scale). Last, in order to determine whether participants perceived the other opinions as being congruent or incongruent with their own experiences, they were asked to rate how satisfied they thought their close friend was with the restaurant using the same scale used to measure their own satisfaction.

Three covariates were included in the study. Participants’ involvement with restaurants was measured on a four-item seven-point product involvement scale, adapted from Lichtenstein, Bloch, and Black (1988). Second, participants’ tendency for market maven was measured on a
six-item seven-point scale originally developed by Feick and Price (1987; see Appendix C for the scale). Market maven relates to the degree to which consumers have knowledge about general consumption-related activities, and influence others by passing on this information.

Third, in order to measure participants’ susceptibility to interpersonal influence and group conformity, a thirteen-item six-point scale called ‘Attention to Social Comparison Information (ATSCI)’ was included (Bearden and Rose 1990; see Appendix C for the scale).

Results

Manipulation Checks. An ANOVA on participants’ perceptions of satisfaction produced a significant main effect of satisfaction ($F(1, 393) = 4782.25, p < 0.001$), indicating that the direction of satisfaction valence was perceived as intended ($\bar{X}_{\text{satisfaction}} = 3.96$, $\bar{X}_{\text{dissatisfaction}} = -3.82$), and the magnitude of dissatisfaction was statistically equal to that of satisfaction ($F(1, 393) = 1.46, p > 0.20$). We used the absolute value of the participants’ satisfaction score as a covariate to control for potential confounds that variation in the magnitude of satisfaction ratings might create. The tie strength manipulation was successful ($F(1, 393) = 1048.12, p < 0.001$; $\bar{X}_{\text{strong tie}} = 0.78$, $\bar{X}_{\text{weak tie}} = 0.44$). Congruency of other opinions was also manipulated successfully ($F(2, 260) = 585.72, p < 0.001$; $\bar{X}_{\text{sat-con}} = 3.73$, $\bar{X}_{\text{sat-incon}} = -2.27$, $\bar{X}_{\text{dis-con}} = -3.40$, $\bar{X}_{\text{dis-incon}} = 2.32$).

Tests of Hypotheses. A 3 x 2 x 2 ANCOVA was performed on each of the two dependent variables: probability to engage in WOM and strength of recommendations. Congruency of other opinions, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and tie strength were independent variables, and satisfaction score (absolute value), product involvement, market maven, and social conformity were covariates. For WOM intention, satisfaction ($F(1, 378) = 13.17, p < 0.001$) and
involvement \( (F (1, 378) = 6.65, p < 0.01) \) were significant. The more satisfied or dissatisfied participants were, the more likely they were to engage in WOM \( (\beta = 2.70; \) a result consistent with Anderson’s (1998) findings of a U-shaped relationship between satisfaction and WOM). Also, as involvement increased, WOM intention increased \( (\beta = 2.58) \). In addition, satisfaction had a significant effect on strength of recommendation \( (F (1, 378) = 72.77, p < 0.001) \), suggesting that the more satisfied or dissatisfied a consumer was, the more likely to make a stronger recommendation or warning, respectively \( (\beta = 0.34) \). The effect of market maven was also significant \( (F (1, 378) = 4.35, p < 0.05, \beta = 0.10) \). As participants’ scored higher on the market maven scale their recommendations became stronger.

There was a significant main effect of congruency on WOM intention \( (F (2, 378) = 10.33, p < 0.001) \) and strength of recommendation \( (F (2, 378) = 27.54, p < 0.001; \) see Table 1 for cell means). We conducted post-hoc analyses to compare the baseline and congruent condition \( (B-C) \), and the baseline and incongruent condition \( (B-I) \). For WOM intention, both comparisons were significant \( (t (265) = 4.61 \) and \( 1.86, p < 0.001 \) and \( < 0.10, \) respectively). Compared to the baseline condition, participants showed greater likelihood of WOM when exposed to either congruent or incongruent other opinions \( (X_{base} = 80.37, X_{con} = 89.39, X_{incon} = 84.40) \). The effect of incongruent other opinion on WOM intention was consistent with the prediction of need for uniqueness. For strength of recommendation, the means were: \( X_{base} = 5.86, X_{con} = 6.12, X_{incon} = 5.25 \): in the presence of congruent other opinions, recommendations were stronger than baseline \( (t (265) = 2.35, p < 0.05) \), while with incongruent other opinions, they were weaker than baseline \( (t (265) = -4.61, p < 0.001) \).

However, these effects of other opinions were moderated by tie strength, as predicted by Hypothesis 1. We obtained significant two way interactions between tie strength and congruence.
of other opinions for both WOM intention ($F(2, 378) = 3.10, p < 0.05$) and strength of recommendation ($F(2, 378) = 6.02, p < 0.005$; see Figure 1a and 1b for graphical representations). Since specific hypotheses were proposed for strong and weak ties separately, we ran sub-analyses by tie strength. For strong ties, neither the main effect of congruence nor the related interaction effect was significant on WOM intention ($F(2, 190) = 1.30, p > 0.25; F(2, 190) = .92, p > 0.40$): participants showed similar WOM intention across all three levels of congruency of other opinion ($\bar{X}_{\text{base-strong}} = 87.74, \bar{X}_{\text{con-strong}} = 91.84, \bar{X}_{\text{incon-strong}} = 88.39$). For weak ties, however, there was a significant effect of congruency of other opinion ($F(2, 197) = 7.45, p < 0.001$). In the presence of either congruent or incongruent other opinions, participants’ intention to engage in WOM was significantly greater than the baseline ($\bar{X}_{\text{base-weak}} = 72.77, \bar{X}_{\text{con-weak}} = 86.94, \bar{X}_{\text{incon-weak}} = 80.34$) although the magnitude of increase appeared larger for B-C than B-I ($t(131) = 4.52, p < 0.001$ and $t(130) = 1.99, p < 0.05$, respectively).

For strength of recommendation, congruence was significant for both strong- and weak-tie sub-analysis ($F(2, 190) = 25.21, p < 0.001; F(2, 197) = 7.37, p < 0.001$, respectively) although the pattern of means was somewhat different. We expected that for strong ties there would be no effect of congruency. Participants’ strength of recommendation was similar for baseline and congruent conditions ($t(132) = -0.50, p > 0.95$), however, it was substantially weaker in the incongruent condition ($t(133) = -6.75, p < 0.001; \bar{X}_{\text{base-strong}} = 6.24, \bar{X}_{\text{con-strong}} = 6.23, \bar{X}_{\text{incon-strong}} = 5.18$). In contrast, weak ties exposed to a congruent other opinion made stronger recommendations than those in the baseline condition ($t(131) = 3.46, p < 0.001$) while those in the incongruent condition were not different than baseline ($t(130) = -.59, p > 0.55; \bar{X}_{\text{base-weak}} = 5.47, \bar{X}_{\text{con-weak}} = 6.02, \bar{X}_{\text{incon-weak}} = 5.32$).
Hypothesis 2 probes the interaction between congruency and satisfaction. Specifically, H2a predicts that an increase in WOM intention in the context of congruent or incongruent opinions (vs. no other opinion) would be greater for dissatisfied than those of satisfied participants. The interaction between congruency and satisfaction on WOM intention \((F(2, 378) = 4.11, p < 0.05)\) is indeed significant, and further analyses at the baseline-level also reveal significant interactions for both the B-C \((F(1, 251) = 4.05, p < 0.05)\) and B-I comparisons \((F(1, 252) = 6.22, p < 0.05); \) see Figure 2a for a graphical representation). Consistent with H2a, participants elevated their intention to engage in WOM when exposed to congruent other opinions—regardless of the satisfaction level [satisfied: \(t(130) = 2.37, p < 0.05\) vs. dissatisfied: \(t(130) = 3.16, p < 0.005\)], and the increase was larger for dissatisfied than satisfied participants \((x_{base-dis} = 78.53, x_{con-dis} = 89.77; x_{base-sat} = 81.65, x_{con-sat} = 89.14)\). In addition, dissatisfied consumers indicated higher WOM intention when exposed to incongruent compared to no other opinions \((t(130) = 2.37, p < 0.05; x_{base-dis} = 78.53, x_{incon-dis} = 88.04)\), whereas satisfied participants’ intention to engage in WOM was similar for both incongruent and no other opinions \((t(131) = 0.40, p > 0.60; x_{base-sat} = 81.65, x_{incon-sat} = 82.00)\).

For strength of recommendation, the overall interaction between congruency of other opinions and satisfaction was corroborated \((F(2, 378) = 2.93, p < 0.06)\). Additional analyses at the baseline-level demonstrate significant interaction for B-C \((F(1, 251) = 4.64, p < 0.05)\) however, non-significant interaction for B-I \((F(1, 252) = 0.40, p > 0.80); \) see Figure 2b for a graphical representation). In testing H2b, we find that participants in satisfied condition made a stronger recommendation when there was a congruent other opinion \((x_{con-sat} = 6.15)\) compared to when no other opinion was expressed \((x_{base-sat} = 5.63; t(130) = 3.51, p < 0.001)\). However, participants in the dissatisfied condition showed no difference in the strength of
“recommendation” whether congruent other opinion was present or no other opinion was given ($t(130) = -0.713, p > 0.50; \bar{X}_{\text{base-dis}} = 6.18, \bar{X}_{\text{con-dis}} = 6.06$). When exposed to an incongruent other opinion, participants had a lower strength of their recommendations or warnings regardless whether satisfied or dissatisfied compared to when exposed to no other opinion ($\bar{X}_{\text{base-sat}} = 5.63, \bar{X}_{\text{incon-sat}} = 5.09; \bar{X}_{\text{base-dis}} = 6.18, \bar{X}_{\text{incon-dis}} = 5.50$). And the difference was similar with respect to the satisfied and dissatisfied consumers. Thus, H2b received a partial support.

**Discussion**

Study 1 had several key findings. First, overall, WOM intention was greater with either congruent or incongruent other opinions than the baseline. In addition, overall there were stronger recommendations in the congruent, but weaker recommendations in the incongruent condition. These findings support a social conformity explanation in the presence of congruent other opinions. With incongruent other opinions, however, the dilemma between social conformity and need for uniqueness seems to be resolved with increased the intention to engage in WOM (need for uniqueness), but tempered with a reduced strength of recommendations (social conformity).

Second, these effects of congruency were moderated by tie strength. When the recipient was a strong tie, participants showed little difference in their WOM intention when exposed to either congruent or incongruent other opinions (relative to the baseline). However, presumably to avoid the psychological costs of opinion deviance, strength of the recommendation was reduced with incongruent other opinions. For weak ties, the desire for self presentation resulted in both WOM intention and strength increasing with congruent other opinions (see Tice et al. 1995).
With incongruent opinions, however, WOM intention increased, but recommendation strength decreased somewhat.

Third, the effects of congruency were moderated by consumer satisfaction. For both satisfied and dissatisfied consumers, congruent opinion (compared to baseline) increased WOM intention, though the magnitude of increase appeared larger in the dissatisfaction condition. On the other hand, incongruent opinions only increased WOM intention for dissatisfied consumers. For the strength of recommendation, participants made weaker recommendations in both satisfied and dissatisfied conditions. The results were generally consistent with our predictions except that the decrease in strength of recommendation for the incongruent condition was significant when the recipient was a strong tie.

In order to further examine our unexpected results and enhance the external validity of the findings from Study 1, we designed Study 2. In Study 2, participants responded based on their own actual experiences with a different service category (mobile phone service) in an active role-playing (as opposed to a scenario) context.

Study 2

Consumer-Brand Relationship Quality

Recent research suggests that consumers develop and maintain relationships with brands (Blackston 1993; Fournier 1994, 1998). Fournier proposed the concept of consumer-brand relationship quality (BRQ) to capture dimensions of such relationships (Fournier 1994, 1998). Increasingly, empirical studies on the topic are starting to underscore BRQ’s importance in determining consumers’ responses toward firms’ marketing activities (Kaltcheva and Weitz 1999; Park, Kim, and Kim 2002). The extant research suggests that high BRQ consumers show
altruistic orientations and behaviors toward brands similar to those they show in communal relationships with humans. In contrast, low BRQ consumers do not feel any special responsibility for the brand, and try to maximize their outcomes while minimizing their costs in brand interactions.

To this end, how will BRQ affect the impact of other opinions on WOM transmission? Because of their affection, trust, and intimacy toward the brand, high BRQ consumers should show their concern about the brand and try to help the brand do better. One pro-relationship behavior is spreading positive WOM. For high BRQ consumers, their intrinsic motives and altruistic behaviors toward the brand should be less prone to influence from other opinions—regardless of congruency. The high level of subjective validity that they tend to have about their evaluations of the brand should also contribute to this disposition. On the other hand, low BRQ consumers, motivated primarily by self-interest as well as characterized by a low level of subjective validity about the brand, are likely to be susceptible to other opinions. The implication is that low BRQ consumers are likely to make modifications to their WOM behavior accordingly. Thus, we expect that BRQ moderates the effect of other opinions on WOM behavior:

H3a: For high BRQ, the presence of an incongruent other opinion will not affect WOM intention compared to baseline; for low BRQ, the presence of an incongruent other opinion will decrease WOM intention compared to baseline.

H3b: For high BRQ, the presence of an incongruent other opinion will not affect strength of recommendation compared to baseline; for low BRQ, the presence of an incongruent other opinions will reduce strength of opinion compared to baseline.
Method

Design. Study 2 was a 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects factorial experiment in which tie strength (strong, weak), BRQ (low, high), and congruency of other opinions (baseline, incongruent) varied. Compared to Study 1, we excluded the congruent other opinion condition for simplicity. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions except for BRQ, which was measured.

Subjects. One hundred and twenty pairs of Korean undergraduate students participated in the experiment as part of a course requirement and for the possibility of winning a lottery for one of four gift certificates worth about $50.

Stimuli and Manipulations. We used mobile phone service since the service provider brands have high awareness among Korean consumers because of their long tenure in the market. Unlike in Study 1, Study 2 participants responded based on personal experience with the service: participants were current mobile phone subscribers. Only satisfied customers were recruited to make the manipulation of the other opinion condition simple and clean. BRQ with mobile phone service was a measured variable.

The manipulation of tie strength was identical to that of Study 1 except that participants were asked to specify someone who was from the same class as theirs and were using a different brand of mobile services. They were asked to participate in the experiment with their partner as a pair.

Procedure. Since we took an active role-playing approach, experimental sessions were conducted in a laboratory as a group of three members: a pair of participants and a confederate. Note that three different roles are required in our experiment: prospective WOM communicator, other opinion giver, and WOM recipient. When participants arrived at the lab, they were
separated to receive instructions about the roles that they would play in the experiment. The participant who would assume a recipient role was instructed to ask for opinions about brands of mobile phone services after explaining that she/he was considering staying with the current service provider or switching to a new provider. To reduce individual variance among participants, they were provided with a script we had prepared. The participant who would play the role of prospective communicator was told to behave as if they were in an everyday conversation.

A confederate played the role of other opinion giver who would offer other opinions immediately after the recipient solicited WOM about mobile services. The confederate was the same gender as the participant, and from a set of graduate students who were assisting with class administrative work. While students tend to become familiar with them as the semester progresses but not to the extent of considering them a friend, the tie strength between our student participants and confederates can be considered between a strong and weak tie.

Once their designated roles had been explained to them, participants got together with a confederate in the laboratory, and the experimental session began. After exchanging brief greetings with one another, the WOM recipient solicited WOM about mobile services. In the conditions in which other opinions were present, the confederate jumped in and talked about her/his experiences with a particular brand of mobile services. An overall recommendation was presented at the end of her/his WOM. The brand was set to be different from that of the recipient and same as that of the prospective WOM communicator. In the baseline condition, where no other opinion is given, the confederate did not engage in WOM communication, and waited for the prospective WOM communicator to start it. Then, the prospective WOM communicator was
implicitly invited to take part in the conversation. After finishing the role-playing, participants were asked to answer some questions, debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

**Measures.** We focused on two measures of interest. First, we measured how fast the participant began to tell about her/his experiences with the brand of mobile services after the other opinions were given, and second, how positive or negative her/his WOM about the brand was, including how strongly she/he recommended that the recipient subscribe or not to subscribe to the brand. The former was measured by our timing the participant’s reaction time with a stopwatch: this latency was used as a proxy of WOM intention. The latter was measured by asking the WOM recipient to evaluate the valence and strength of the WOM communication on a three-item eleven-point scale ("her/his WOM was very negative – her/his WOM was very positive," “she/he seemed very dissatisfied – she/he seemed very satisfied,” “she/he strongly recommended not to subscribe – she/he strongly recommended to subscribe”).

In addition, the prospective WOM communicators were asked to answer a series of other questions. Manipulation checks for satisfaction/dissatisfaction and tie strength with the WOM recipient were included. BRQ was measured using twenty-five seven-point items that were adapted for mobile phone service (Fournier 1994; Park et al. 2002; see Appendix C for the scale). Participants’ BRQ average score ranged from 1 to 6.32 with median of 3.88 (s.d. = 1.29). Those who scored below the median were assigned to the low BRQ group, and above to the high group. Prospective WOM communicator’s perceptions about the valence and strength of the confederate’s opinion were also measured as manipulation check for incongruency of other opinion. Two covariates were also included: the participants’ product involvement with the mobile services and market maven tendency. These scales were identical to those used in Study 1.
Results

**Manipulation Checks.** All participants reported satisfaction with their brand of mobile service; satisfaction levels did not differ across experimental conditions (all $p$s $> .45$) except for BRQ. As expected, participants with high BRQ were more satisfied than with those with low BRQ ($F(1, 109) = 8.31, p < 0.005, \bar{X}_{\text{low}} = 2.64, \bar{X}_{\text{high}} = 3.24$). As in Study 1, we used the absolute value of the participants’ satisfaction score as a covariate in the main analysis, thus controlling for potential confounds that variation in the magnitude of satisfaction ratings might create. Also, the valence and strength of other opinions was perceived to be negative/dissatisfied by the participants (Mean $= -3.78$, sd $= .59$), and thus the manipulation of incongruent other opinion was successful. Means did not differ significantly across experimental conditions (all $p$s $> .30$). Lastly, the mean tie-strength ratings differed significantly (0.78 for strong ties vs. 0.57 for weak ties; $t(118) = 7.97, p < 0.001$).

**Tests of Hypotheses.** We ran 2 x 2 x 2 ANCOVAs on participants’ reaction time and strength of recommendations, with congruency of other opinions, BRQ, and tie strength as independent variables, and satisfaction score (absolute value), product involvement, and market maven as covariates. For WOM reaction time, market maven was significant ($F(1, 109) = 7.23, p < 0.01$): higher market maven scores yielded faster reaction times ($\beta = -2.69$). The satisfaction score was significant on strength of recommendation ($F(1, 109) = 38.72, p < 0.001$): greater satisfaction yielded stronger recommendations ($\beta = .39$). Product involvement was marginally significant ($F(1, 109) = 3.18, p < 0.10$): greater involvement increased recommendation strength ($\beta = .10$).

Study 2 allows us to reexamine Hypotheses 1 with different measures and in a different product context relative to Study 1. Overall, we replicated the main effect results of Study 1 for
WOM intention and strength of recommendation. Reaction time was faster when exposed to incongruent other opinions compared to when no other opinions were given, though the difference was small (\(\bar{X}_{\text{base}} = 5.53\) seconds, \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon}} = 5.16\), \(F(1, 109) = 3.40, p < 0.10\), see Table 2 for cell means). In addition, participants made weaker recommendations in the incongruent than in the baseline condition (\(\bar{X}_{\text{base}} = 2.29\), \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon}} = 1.88\), \(F(1, 109) = 4.07, p < 0.05\)). For H1, we replicated the results for strength of recommendation (H1b) but not intention (H1a). For intention, the two-way interaction between tie strength and congruence was non-significant (\(F(1, 109) = 1.02, p > 0.30\); see Figure 3a for a graphical representation), though the pattern of results was the same as we obtained in Study 1 (\(\bar{X}_{\text{base-strong}} = 4.42\) seconds, \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon-strong}} = 4.34\), \(\bar{X}_{\text{base-weak}} = 6.63\), \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon-weak}} = 5.99\)). For strength of recommendation, the interaction was significant (\(F(1, 109) = 4.81, p < 0.05\); see Figure 3b for a graphical representation) and consistent with Study 1: for strong ties, there were no differences between baseline and incongruent conditions (\(\bar{X}_{\text{base-strong}} = 2.57\), \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon-strong}} = 2.53\)); but for weak ties, recommendations were weaker in the incongruent than in the baseline condition (\(\bar{X}_{\text{base-weak}} = 2.02\), \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon-weak}} = 1.22\)).

Hypothesis 3 postulates an interaction between congruency of opinion and BRQ. We found a significant interaction for congruency and BRQ on WOM reaction time and on strength of recommendation. Opposite from our prediction, however, participants with low BRQ reacted more quickly when there were incongruent opinions compared to the baseline, whereas participants with high BRQ behaved similarly whether or not there were other opinions (\(\bar{X}_{\text{base-low}} = 6.40\) seconds, \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon-low}} = 5.52\); \(\bar{X}_{\text{base-high}} = 4.65\), \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon-high}} = 4.80\), \(F(1, 109) = 4.27, p < .05\); see Figure 4a for a graphical representation). The strength-of-recommendation results were consistent with our prediction: for low BRQ, recommendations were weaker in incongruent than the baseline (\(\bar{X}_{\text{base-low}} = 1.82\), \(\bar{X}_{\text{incon-low}} = 1.15\)), but for high BRQ, there was
no difference ($\bar{X}_{\text{base-high}} = 2.77$, $\bar{X}_{\text{incon-high}} = 2.60$, $F(1, 109) = 4.82$, $p < 0.05$; see Figure 4b for a graphical representation).

**General Discussion**

**Theoretical Implications**

In this paper, we have attempted to push the envelope of the traditional boundaries of WOM research and also social influence literature on several fronts. In the WOM literature, prior research tends to focus on either WOM intention or incidences as the important aspects of WOM transmission behavior. However, we considered strength of recommendation as an additional dimension, and found that consumers made a tradeoff between WOM intention and the strength of recommendation under certain circumstances. That is, participants in our experiments were more likely to engage in WOM when incongruent other opinions had been given. However, in response to incongruent opinions, they systematically reduced the strength of their recommendations. This result challenges our implicit assumption that WOM intention is highly correlated with the other aspects of WOM transmission behavior, which warrants attention beyond the intention dimension of WOM.

A related implication has to do with the long-lasting debate concerning who would spread more WOM, satisfied or dissatisfied customers. Our results showed that dissatisfied customers (vs. satisfied ones) were more likely increase their WOM intention and less likely to modify their strength of recommendation when exposed to other opinions compared to when no other opinion was given. That is, the presence or absence of other opinions played a moderating role in determining the relationship between satisfaction/dissatisfaction and WOM transmission behavior. Since existing work has primarily focused on establishing the main relationship
between the two constructs, it may be a good time for us to take a new perspective and to make more efforts to identify moderators.

In addition, our research sheds some light on resolving the conflicting predictions of two theories, that is, MUM effects and negativity biases, about the asymmetric impact of dissatisfaction on information transmission (i.e., negative or bad news): MUM effects predict people’s reluctance to communicate negative news, whereas negativity biases suggest the opposite. In our study, different mechanisms were found to be activated depending upon which dimension of WOM consumers were considering. Consumers’ WOM intention was consistent with MUM effects, whereas their strength of recommendation was consistent with negativity biases. As our findings provide initial but indirect support, future research should make more systematic attempts to investigate the similarities and differences between the two theories in the communication context.

As for research on social or group influence, the dominant school of thought has been that individuals have a tendency to behave in accordance with group or social norms—though exceptions were proposed by few scholars. We adopted a goal-balancing perspective, and identified conditions under which different patterns of social influence were observed in the context of WOM transmission; social conformity or need for uniqueness. Although social conformity was found to have quite a strong influence on both consumers’ WOM intention and the strength of recommendation when exposed to congruent other opinions, consumers tended to emphasize their own behavior in the presence of incongruent other opinions. This need for uniqueness seemed to be particularly salient in affecting consumers’ WOM intention, but not strength of recommendation, when the recipient was a weak tie, when they were dissatisfied, and when they had a low degree of BRQ.
Finally, our study yielded interesting insights about the impact of BRQ. Akin to human relationship, participants manifesting strong “relationship” with a brand were not affected by other incongruent opinions in their WOM tendency and strength of recommendation. They behaved in a similar way as consumers interacting with strong ties. In contrast, participants with low BRQ were quite susceptible to social influence. They increased their WOM tendency compared to the baseline when others engaged in WOM, and modified the strength of recommendation according to what social conformity would stipulate. Nonetheless, since research on BRQ and other related concepts (e.g., brand community or attachment) is still relatively sparse, more work is warranted to advance our understanding on nature of brand relationship—in particular, on the parallels and differences with respect to human relationship.

Managerial Implications

Our research offers practical implications for marketing managers especially in managing WOM behavior of their customers. The most basic and first step would be to closely monitor WOM flow and interactions occurring in places where multiple opinions are likely to be observed, i.e., such as company website, chat rooms, and online communities. Firms need to take more proactive and customized actions to manage various WOM environments. For instance, Study 1 showed that dissatisfied customers were much more likely to increase their WOM intention when exposed to other dissatisfied opinions in a multiple-person context compared to when no other opinion had been given. Although it is impossible for all customers to be satisfied, our results emphasize the importance of heading-off dissatisfaction before it turns into negative WOM. Negative WOM is likely to snowball once it starts in multiple-person settings. Thus, firms should devise efficient complaint-handling systems and implement prompt service
recovery strategies, a point that is not new, but our results emphasize the importance of very early intervention: before the snowball effect has a chance to start. Customers should be encouraged to contact the firm for any topics that may be a potential source of dissatisfaction, which may mitigate the chances them turning to other (dissatisfied) customers as an outlet for negative communication. At the minimum, firms need to set-up multiple channels of communications with customers, which are readily accessible and salient; hence, complaints can be addressed quickly and in a manner perceived as fair (e.g., Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekaran 1998).

On the flipside, firms should actively facilitate satisfied customers telling other customers about their positive experiences. Satisfied customers are more likely to share their satisfied experiences if they see others are satisfied too. This can be done in several ways. Firms can simulate positive WOM in a group setting in the advertisements in which satisfied customers sequentially engage in WOM about the firm’s service, or offer satisfied customers a reward if they recommend new customers (i.e., they employ customer referral programs; Biyalogorsky, Gerstner, and Libai 2000). Firms can reward customers who want to share their satisfactory experiences about the firms’ services with other customers by making their stories or testimonials available on the firms’ homepage or newsletter. If the firm wins customer satisfaction awards or has positive survey results about its service quality, this can be used as a congruent other opinion to stimulate satisfied customers to share their experiences, especially through the places where a majority of weak ties interact with one another such as newly-opened community sites.

Relatedly, our results suggest that building and maintaining a strong relationship with customers will be effective in generating positive WOM regardless of the presence of other
opinions. Customer with high BRQ maintained a high level of WOM behavior and strength of recommendations even when exposed to other incongruent opinions (i.e., dissatisfied). For customers with low BRQ, positive information that other customers are satisfied with the firm’s services should be provided, so that their WOM intention can be increased since they tend to have a low intention to engage in WOM in the first place.

Also, another competitive strategic implication from the BRQ findings is that firms should initially target consumers with low BRQ with respect to the competitor’s brand—as marketing efforts by any other firms will likely fall on deaf ears to those with high BRQ. In designing messages targeted at competitor’s consumer with low BRQ, making salient some information that is incongruent with the consumer’s prior knowledge of the competing brand may potentially be an effective strategy. For instance, the message can perhaps take the form of a press release or comparative advertisement.
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### Table 1

**WOM Likelihood and Recommendation Strength by Experimental Condition: Study 1**

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th></th>
<th>Dissatisfaction</th>
<th></th>
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<td>Strong Tie</td>
<td>Weak Tie</td>
<td>Strong Tie</td>
<td>Weak Tie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM Likelihood**</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation Strength</strong></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N: No Other Opinion (Baseline), C: Congruent Other Opinion, I: Incongruent Other Opinion
** WOM likelihood was measured on 0% - 100% scale, and recommendation strength was measured on 1 – 7 scale.

### Table 2

**WOM Reaction Time and Recommendation Strength by Experimental Condition: Study 2**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>High BRQ</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>Weak Tie</td>
<td>Strong Tie</td>
<td>Weak Tie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>N'</td>
<td>I</td>
<td><strong>N</strong></td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOM Reaction Time**</td>
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<td>4.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6.3t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation Strength</strong></td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.6t</td>
<td>0.5t</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N: No Other Opinion (Baseline), I: Incongruent Other Opinion
** WOM reaction time was measured by seconds and milliseconds, and recommendation strength was measured on -5 – +5 scale.
Figure 1a
The Effect of Other Opinions and Tie Strength on WOM Intention

Figure 1b
The Effect of Other Opinions and Tie Strength on Strength of Recommendations
Figure 2a
The Effect of Other Opinions and Satisfaction on WOM Intention

Figure 2b
The Effect of Other Opinions and Satisfaction on Strength of Recommendations
Figure 3a
The Effect of Other Opinions and Tie Strength on WOM Reaction Time

Figure 3b
The Effect of Other Opinions and Tie Strength on Strength of Recommendations
Figure 4a
The Effect of Other Opinions and BRQ on WOM Reaction Time

Figure 4b
The Effect of Other Opinions and BRQ on Strength of Recommendations
Appendix A

Scenario 1: Satisfied Customers (for female subjects)

Located along Scotts Road, *Capellini* Restaurant is a new Italian restaurant that opened months ago. As Italian food is a favorite of mine, I was looking forward to trying out this new restaurant. I finally had the opportunity to have dinner there on Thursday night with my boyfriend.

When we arrived at 7 p.m., the restaurant was quite crowded, and a queue was beginning to form at the door. However, as we had made reservations, we only had to wait a few minutes to be seated. I noticed that the restaurant had a warm and cozy ambience, and its décor had a genuine Italian feel. In addition, there was a small patio for diners who preferred outdoor dining. The music played was also fun and not too loud, creating a pleasant atmosphere for us to chat with each other.

The Italian food at *Capellini* Restaurant was both affordable and authentic. Main courses ranged from $20 to $35, a reasonable sum given the variety and quality of the food. Our meal began with appetizers of freshly baked bread with cheese. For main course, I had delicious seafood pasta with creamy white sauce and fresh seafood. I really savored each mouthful and was tempted for more. My boyfriend also enjoyed his grilled chicken chop, which was tender and matched with a mouth-watering mushroom sauce. The tiramisu we had for dessert was creamy with a delectable coffee and liquor touch.

In addition, *Capellini* Restaurant really impressed me with its great service. The staff was friendly and our waiter was prompt and attentive to our table all evening. He was also patient and knowledgeable in helping us make choices from the menu, and made sure our water glasses were never empty. The staff really put in extra effort to make us feel welcome at the restaurant. We were also sent off with an invitation to come again when we left the restaurant.

Overall, the food was great and the service excellent. As it was a new restaurant, I had not expected such high levels of food and service. However, the dining experience at *Capellini* Restaurant surpassed my expectations and I would not hesitate to return to this restaurant again.
Scenario 1: Dissatisfied Customers (for female subjects)

Located along Scotts Road, Capellini Restaurant is a new Italian restaurant that opened months ago. As Italian food is a favorite of mine, I was looking forward to trying out this new restaurant. I finally had the opportunity to have dinner there on Thursday night with my boyfriend.

When we arrived at 7 p.m., the restaurant was not full, but a queue had formed at the door due to lack of attention by the restaurant staff. As we had made reservations, we expected only a short wait before we were seated. However we had to wait about 10 minutes before we were finally shown to our table. This feeling rather annoyed. However I noticed that the restaurant had a warm and cozy ambience, its décor had a genuine Italian feel. In addition, there was a small patio for diners who preferred outdoor dining. The music played was also fun but not too loud, creating a pleasant atmosphere for us to chat with each other.

The Italian food at Capellini Restaurant was affordable with main courses between the range of $25 to $35. However, given the quality of the food served, I would have gladly paid more to get better service. Our meal began with appetizers of bread with cheese, but instead of being freshly baked, it was cold and hard. For main course, I had seafood pasta with white sauce and seafood. Although the sauce was delicious, the seafood served was not very fresh. My boyfriend had grilled chicken which was tender and juicy. Unfortunately, the chicken was over-seasoned, making it too salty for me to enjoy. The only saving grace was the tiramisu we had for dessert. It was creamy and had a delicate coffee and liquor taste.

In addition, Capellini Restaurant really disappointed us with its poor service. From the start of our visit, we were faced all around with inefficient and indifferent staff. Our waiter was inattentive; he failed to refill our drinks and we had to flag down a waiter just to get our water glasses refilled. Service was also quite slow and we had to wait rather long before each course was served. The staff really did not care to make us feel welcome at the restaurant. We left the restaurant with the impression that our presence was just an inconvenience to them.

Overall, while the ambience was nice, the food was not up to par and the service was really bad. As it was a new restaurant, my expectations had not been very high to start with. However my experience at Capellini Restaurant was really below my expectations and I would certainly not return to this restaurant again.
Appendix B

Scenario 2: ‘No Other Opinion’ and ‘Weak Tie’ (for female subjects)

It is the weekend, and you are going to have coffee with your closest friend Jane. As the two walk towards Starbucks, you meet Mei Yee, Jane’s classmate, who is out shopping at the same time. This is the first time you have met Mei Yee, even though you have heard of her a few times before.

Jane invites Mei Yee to join you for coffee, and three of you sit down at Starbucks and start chatting…

Mei Yee discusses her plans for celebrating her friend’s birthday the coming week. She wants to have dinner at a good but affordable restaurant but isn’t sure which one to go to. She asks if you can recommend any restaurants that she should try or avoid. You are reminded of your own experience at the Italian restaurant, Capellini Restaurant.

Scenario 2: ‘Satisfied Other Opinion’ and ‘Strong Tie’ (for female subjects)

It is the weekend, and you are going to have coffee with your closest friend Jane. As the two walk towards Starbucks, you meet Mei Yee, another one of your closest friends, who is out shopping at the same time.

You invite Mei Yee to join you for coffee, and three of you sit down at Starbucks and start chatting…

Mei Yee discusses her plans for celebrating her friend’s birthday the coming week. She wants to have dinner at a good but affordable restaurant but isn’t sure which one to go to. She asks if you can recommend any restaurants that she should try or avoid. Jane says that Mei Yee should go to the new Italian restaurant, Capellini Restaurant. She had dinner there a few days ago and was satisfied with her experience at the restaurant. You are reminded of your own experience at the same restaurant, Capellini Restaurant.
It is the weekend, and you are going to have coffee with your closest friend Jane. As the two walk towards Starbucks, you meet Mei Yee, Jane’s classmate, who is out shopping at the same time. This is the first time you have met Mei Yee, even though you have heard of her a few times before.

Jane invites Mei Yee to join you for coffee, and three of you sit down at Starbucks and start chatting…

Mei Yee discusses her plans for celebrating her friend’s birthday the coming week. She wants to have dinner at a good but affordable restaurant but isn’t sure which one to go to. She asks if you and Jane can recommend any restaurants that she should try or avoid. Jane says that Mei Yee should not go to the new Italian restaurant, Capellini Restaurant. She had dinner there a few days ago and was dissatisfied with her experience at the restaurant. You are reminded of your own experience at the same Italian restaurant, Capellini Restaurant.
Appendix C

Tie Strength scale
1. … is someone whom you would be willing to share personal confidences with.
2. … is someone whom you would gladly spend a free afternoon socializing with.
3. … is someone whom you would be likely to perform a LARGE favor for.
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, please rate the level of closeness of … to you, as presented in the scenario.

Market Maven scale
1. I like introducing new brands and products to my friend.
2. I like helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of products.
3. People ask me for information about products, places to shop, or sales.
4. If someone asked where to get the best buy on several products, I tell him or her where to shop.
5. My friends think of me as a good source of information when it comes to new products or sales.
6. Think about a person who has information about a variety of products and shares this information with others. This person knows about new products, sales, stores, and so on but does not necessarily feel he or she is an expert on one particular product. How well would you say this description fits you?

Attention to Social Comparison Information (ATSCI) scale
1. It is my feeling that if everyone else in a group is behaving in a certain manner, this must be the way to behave
2. I actively avoid wearing clothes that are not in style.
3. At parties I usually try to behave in a manner that makes me fit in.
4. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues.
5. I try to pay attention to the reactions of others to my behavior in order to avoid being out of place.
6. I find that I tend to pick up slang expressions from others and use them as part of my own vocabulary.
7. I tend to pay attention to what others are wearing.
8. The slightest look of disapproval in the eyes of a person with whom I am interacting is enough to make me change my approach.
9. It’s important to me to fit in with the group I’m with.
10. My behavior often depends on how I feel others wish me to behave.
11. If I am the least bit uncertain as to how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior to others for cues.
12. I usually keep up with clothing style changes by watching what others wear.
13. When in a social situation, I tend not to follow the crowd, but instead behave in a manner that suits my particular mood at the time.

Consumer-Brand Relationship Quality scale
1. I will stay with this brand through good and bad times.
2. I am willing to make sacrifices to keep using this brand.
3. I keep this brand in mind all the time.
4. I have made a commitment to this brand.
5. I feel something amiss when I stop using this brand.
6. This brand plays an important role in my daily life.
7. This brand is reliable and dependable.
8. I have a lot of respect for this brand.
9. I feel safe and secure when I use this brand.
10. This brand adds a sense of stability to my life.
11. This brand and I have a lot in common.
12. This brand image and my self-image are similar in many ways.
13. I feel this brand is a part of me.
14. I know a lot about this brand.
15. I feel as though I really understand this brand.
16. I know things about this brand that many people just don’t know.
17. This brand treats me like a valuable customer.
18. This brand shows continuing interest in me.
19. This brand takes good care of me.
20. No other brand can replace this brand.
21. I would be very upset if I couldn’t access this brand when I wanted to.
22. I feel a powerful attraction toward this brand.
23. This brand reminds me of what I was like at a previous stage of my life.
24. This brand reminds me of someone important in my life.
25. I have at least one fond memory that involves using this brand.