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THE EFFECT OF CROWDEDNESS ON THE CONTENT OF WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATIONS

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Abstract

Word-of-mouth (WOM) communications have a great importance for brands' marketing success and sales. The context in which the WOM communications take place is not yet well studied, and its effect on WOM behavior is not well known. This research studies on how crowdedness affects what people share and focuses on whether crowdedness makes consumers more likely to share self-presentational (as opposed to audience-focused or useful) content. Hypothesis that consumers are more likely to share self-presentational content in crowded environments was not supported by the controlled experiment conducted, but additional analyses provide insights on how different emotions affect what people share.

Key words: word-of-mouth, crowdedness, self-presentation, audience-focus

Introduction

Word-of-Mouth (from here on WOM) communications are ”informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers” (Westbrook, 1987). WOM includes communications such as recommending a book, reviewing a restaurant, talking about products, or sharing coupons or information of promotions. These communications can occur face-to-face, but today a great part of WOM is occurring online. Consumers review and recommend products online, and share about their experiences on social networks. WOM is an important factor impacting purchases and generating sales. It has been shown to be the primary factor behind up to 50 percent of all purchasing decisions (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010), and research has shown that 50 percent of consumers say that they are very likely to make a purchase as a result of a WOM conversation (Keller and Fay, 2012). Due to the great impact of WOM communications and advertising, WOM is an important and interesting topic for researchers, marketers and companies.

Previous research has studied the content of WOM communications (e.g. Alexandrov, Lilly & Babakus, 2013, Berger, 2011, and Berger and Milkman, 2012), but there has not been much research on how the context (e.g. environmental factors) in which WOM communications take place affects the content. This research studies how crowdedness affects the content of what people share in their WOM communications, namely, if crowdedness increases self- (as opposed to other-) focused sharing.

Literature Review

Previous research has identified several reasons why people engage in WOM communications. These reason include self-related reasons (such as self-enhancement and self-affirmation, Alexandrov, Lilly & Babakus, 2013), social reasons (such as desire for social interaction, Hennigh-Thurau et al., 2004, social comparison and social bonding, Alexandrov, et al., 2013), altruistic reasons, and product-, brand-, and company-related reasons (Sundaram, Mitra and Webster, 1998).

In addition to reasons to engage in WOM, existing research has studied what kind of content people are most likely to share (e.g. positive or negative content (Alexandrov et al., 2013), arousing vs. non-arousing content (Berger, 2011, Berger and Milkman, 2012) and how WOM affects purchase decisions and sales. However, little research has been conducted on the context in which WOM takes place, and how this context affects WOM behavior.

Nowadays, a great part of WOM communications occur in crowded conditions. People post on social media about things they see and experience in settings such as public transportation, coffee shops and restaurants, malls, crowded waiting rooms and so on. Previous research has suggested that people are more likely to engage in WOM in crowded settings (Consiglio, De Angelis, and Costabile, 2015), but there has not yet been research on how the crowdedness affects the content of what people share.

Existing research has studied the effect of the presence of others, and of crowdedness, on consumers' emotions, preferences and purchase decisions. Xu, Shen, and Wyer (2012) showed that when consumers are in a crowded environment due to reasons beyond their control, they choose products that are more unique and distinctive

in order to reaffirm their independence and uniqueness. Mere presence of others can impact consumers' preferences (Ariely and Levav, 2000). Levav and Zhu (2009) found that store crowding led the consumers to higher variety seeking, in order to regain their freedom. Social presence is also shown to increase existing feelings of embarrassment related to a purchase decision (Dahl, Manchanda, and Argo, 2001).

Previous research has suggested that crowdedness increases people's likelihood of sharing information (Consiglio et al., 2015). Potential reasons behind this behavior include the need to restore control, seeking to reaffirm identity as unique and independent individuals (Xu et al., 2012), to address the threat to freedom (e.g. by using unique content as a tool to express freedom, Levav and Zhu, 2009) and to find an outlet for negative emotions (venting, Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster, 1998).

Crowdedness has shown to increase mental and physical distress (Cohen and Sherrod, 1978), and to evoke higher arousal and loss of perceived behavioral and cognitive control (Langer and Saegert, 1997). Physical density has been suggested to evoke perceived crowdedness via affecting people's perceived control (Rodin, Solomon, and Metcalf, 1978). The stress caused by crowdedness has been shown to be mediated by perceived control (Fleming, Baum, and Weiss, 1987). Regaining the sense of control has been shown to make people in crowded settings feel better and more confident, and behave in a more effective manner (Langer and Saegert, 1997), and feeling that the situation is potentially controllable diminishes the negative impact of the crowdedness (Cohen and Sherrod, 1978). WOM can offer means to address the loss of perceived control. It can be a tool for self-affirmation (Alexandrov et al., 2013), which has been shown to help to cope with stress and enable better processing of information (Sherman and Cohen, 2006). The stress caused by the crowdedness can also be averted

by a reappraisal of the situation (Langer and Saegert, 1997), and sharing one's experience might be a tool for reappraisal. WOM can be used to self-enhance, express one's personality and therefore regain control of one's image (Berger, 2014). Explaining one's experiences makes it easier to understand them (Moore, 2011). Sharing experiences also helps to make sense of them, which aids emotion regulation (Rimé. 2009), and can therefore allow people to feel and cope better in crowded environments, especially as a shown effect of crowdedness is a perceived overload of information and unpredictable events of the environment (Fleming, Baum, and Weiss, 1987).

While there are potential indications and already existing research to suggest that people engage more in WOM communications in crowded settings (compared to non-crowded settings), it has not yet been studied how the crowdedness affects the content of what people share in WOM communications. As crowdedness can have significant impact on people's emotions and behavior, it is likely that it can affect the WOM behavior. Understanding this effect is important to marketers and businesses. For instance, if consumers in crowded environments are more likely to share negative (as opposed to positive) WOM, triggering conversations about one's products in crowded environments might harm the brand. In this case, targeted messaging to consumers in crowded malls, for instance, would not be beneficial for the business.

This research studies the impact of crowdedness on the content that consumers share in their WOM communications and focuses on whether consumers are more likely to share self-presentational or audience-focused and useful content. My hypothesis is that in crowded environments, consumers are more likely to share self-presentational

(rather than audience-focused content). I will explain the hypothesis development below.

Self-presentational content is self-disclosure, sharing one's personal experiences (without content that is aimed to aid others, such as reviews) or sharing something aimed to make one look good and enhance the self-concept (Barasch and Berger, 2014). This kind of content includes posting pictures, updates and comments about oneself and one's experiences. Audience-focused content is something that is believed to be useful and relevant to the audience one is communicating to (Barasch and Berger, 2014). Examples of this type of content include posting product reviews, recommending products, providing information or help to purchase and use a product or service, and passing on coupons and other useful shareable items. For instance, a consumer can post a picture of herself (a selfie) using a brand's product without advice or information directed to be of use for others. This content would be self-presentational. A consumer could also write about her experiences with the product, possible problems encountered, and solutions for these problems. This would be audience-focused, useful content, as it could be expected to be of use and relevance to the audience. Also, a consumer could write about a service experience in a self-presentational way (e.g. "I had so much fun at the bar. I had the best company and danced all night!"), without providing information that would be helpful to others seeking similar service provider, or in a audience-focused way (e.g. "The new bar that opened is nice. We tried the cocktails and they were delicious, yet pricey."), which could provide relevant and useful information to other consumers.

As discussed above, WOM serves such purposes as self-enhancement (presenting oneself in a certain way) and self-affirmation (stating one's identity). The

need for self-enhancement and self-affirmation could be higher in a crowded condition, due to the perceived threat to one's uniqueness and identity as an independent individual (Xu et al., 2012).

Also, self-affirmation can allow better functioning in a crowded situation, as it helps with stress management ad information processing (Sherman and Cohen, 2006). These findings could suggest that people benefit from or feel a higher need for more self-related information sharing (sharing about one's emotions, experiences or activities without aiming to provide useful information or advice to others) in crowded situations. For instance, in order to self-affirm, people can post a picture of (oneself with) an item or location that has personal significance. A picture with a pet, one's holiday spot, or of the gym where one trains can be used as self-affirmation.

Crowdedness has also been linked to some antisocial behaviors and emotions. Baum and Gatchel (1981) showed that crowdedness can lead to people to withdraw from social interactions and become less involved with other people. Griffitt and Veitch (1971) showed that crowdedness can lead to hostility. There have been shown to be less willingness to help and decreased positive feelings towards others in high-density environments (Langer and Saegert, 1977), and people in higher density environments feel less positively oriented to become acquainted with other people (Langer and Saegert, 1977). It has also been shown that a way to deal in a crowded environment is to pay no more attention than needed to the people around (Aranguren and Tonnelat, 2014). These reasons might indicate that crowdedness can provoke reduced willingness to connect with others and increased self-centricity. Previous research has also shown that imagining a large group of people makes "others" seem less concrete, which increases self-centricity (Barasch and Berger, 2014). A similar effect might be expected

when one is placed in a large group of people, in a crowd. Again, this might lead consumers to engage in self-presentational sharing. The WOM communications might be more likely to be self-centered instead of being audience-focused or have content aimed to be useful to others.

Based on the findings discussed above, my hypothesis is that in crowded settings, people share more self-presentational (vs. useful or audience-focused) content compared to non-crowded settings.

The question how crowdedness affects the content of WOM communications has several managerial implications. Nowadays marketers are able to target individuals based on their location due to mobile technologies. They are often able to know where the consumers are at the current moment, and can send promotional communications, such as texts and email, to selected consumers. Online advertisements can also be designed to be shown only to consumers in certain locations. Therefore, it has become increasingly important to tailor the marketing message according to the external conditions of the target audience. People engage in WOM communications while they are in crowded environments, and marketers will benefit from understanding what kind of content is the most likely to be shared, and what kind of WOM is the target audience likely to add and create on their own. For instance, if crowdedness encourages people to share self-presentational information, self-presentational products (e.g. products symbolic of identity, such as cars, clothes and hairstyles, Berger, 2014) might benefit from being advertised in crowded settings (by targeted messaging with physical advertisements, such as an advertisement on a subway, or with mobile technologies, such as a social media add or a promotional text). Also, if the WOM that the marketers wish to spur is of self-presentational nature, such as launching a campaign where people

post their own experiences or pictures, this message could be best communicated in crowded environments. On the other hand, if the products or the message are of useful and other-focused nature, it might be best to reserve their promotion to non-crowded settings, where their message would be less likely to be trumped by self-presentational sharing.

Experiment

Methods

72 university students (68,1% female, mean age = 23 years) filled the same questionnaire in either crowded condition (11 or 12 people in the same room), or non-crowded condition (4 or fewer people in the same room). The questionnaire included six useful and others-focused items (e.g. “a link to a discount coupon people can download and use in a store they like”, “information on how to buy tickets to a popular upcoming concert”) and six self-presentational items (e.g. “how much fun you had last night at a concert”, “that you recently ran a marathon”) the participants might share with other people on social media. These items were adapted from studies conducted by Alixandra Barasch and Jonah Berger (2014), in which they were also used to measure useful and others-focused and self-presentational social media sharing. The participants were asked to rate how likely they would be to share these items. The questionnaire also included one scenario with self-presentational focus (“Last weekend you made a road trip and had a great time.”) and one scenario that prompted an opportunity to share useful and others-focused content (a recommendation, “You have had a very positive experience

with a certain grocery delivery.”). The participants were asked how likely they would be to make a post about these scenarios in social media, and they were asked to write down what they would post. The questionnaire also included a scale to measure positive and negative affect (adapted from Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988), and a three-item control scale (adapted to fit this questionnaire from the perceived loss of control scale developed by Newcomb and Harlow, 1986).

Results

The assumptions necessary for performing the following analysis were met. The variables were normally distributed, there was homogeneity of variances, the samples were independent, and there were no significant outliers.

Perceived crowdedness

A manipulation check confirmed that the participants in the non-crowded condition felt the room to be significantly less crowded than the participants in the crowded condition ($M_{non\text{-}crowded} = 2.22$ vs. $M_{crowded} = 5.23$, $t(70) = -8.546$, $p < 0.001$).

Perceived control

An Independent Samples T-Test did not reveal significant differences in perceived control between the two groups ($p = 0.342$).

Self-focused and others-focused sharing

On average, participants engaged more in self-focused than other focused sharing ($M_{self\text{-}focused} = 3.95$, $M_{other\text{-}focused} = 3.03$, $M_{self\text{-}vs\text{-}other} = 0.92$, $t(71) = 5.382$, $p < 0.001$). Opposite to

what was hypothesized, in the non-crowded condition, there was more sharing of the both types of content ($M_{self\text{-}focused,\ non\text{-}crowded} = 4.17$, $M_{other\text{-}focused,\ non\text{-}crowded} = 3.27$, $M_{self\text{-}focused,\ crowded} = 3.72$, $M_{other\text{-}focused,\ crowded} = 2.78$) compared to crowded condition, though these effects where not statistically significant ($p = 0.187$ and $p = 0.079$, for self-focused and other-focused sharing, respectively). There was no significant difference in the amount of self-focused sharing compared to other-focused sharing between the two conditions ($p = 0.068$).

Positive and negative affect

An Independent Samples T-Test did not reveal significant differences in positive affect or in negative affect between the two groups ($p = 0.233$, $p = 0.739$, respectively).

Additional analysis

Though not connected to the initial hypothesis or the objective of this research, the analysis showed correlations between some items to be shared on social media and some emotions. Negative correlations were found between (feeling) "upset" and (being likely to share) "Something that makes you look cool" ($r(70) = -0.311$, $p < 0.01$), "hostile" and "Something that makes you look cool" ($r(68) = -0.280$, $p < 0.05$), and "irritable" and "Something that makes you look cool" ($r(70) = -0.298$, $p < 0.05$). There were also negative correlations between "hostile" and (being likely to share) "A really positive experience you had recently" ($r(68) = -2.80$, $p < 0.05$) and "hostile" and being likely to post about a road trip where one had a great time ($r(68) = -0.274$, $p < 0.05$).

Positive correlations were found between (feeling) "nervous" and "embarrassed" and (being likely to share) "Notes for midterms" ($r(70) = 0.302$, $p < 0.01$, $r(70) = 0.239$,

$p < 0.05$, respectively), and "scared" and "afraid" and "A review for a new restaurant that just opened" ($r(70) = 0.255$, $p < 0.05$, and $r(70) = 0.288$, $p < 0.05$, respectively). There were negative correlations between (feeling) "at ease" and (being likely to share) "Notes for midterms" and being likely to post a recommendation for a grocery delivery service ($r(69) = -0.237$, $p < 0.05$, and $r(69) = -0.252$, $p < 0.05$, respectively).

Discussion

The results from the research did not provide support for the hypothesis that in crowded settings, people share more self-presentational (vs. useful or audience-focused) content compared to non-crowded settings. There was no more likelihood for overall sharing, and the difference in sharing self-focused content in the crowded condition than in the non-crowded one was not statistically significant ($p = 0.068$). However, this might be due to a power issue, as the result can be seen as marginally significant. In the future, it would be beneficial to run the study with a higher number of participants in order to increase the power of the test. There was more other-focused sharing in the non-crowded condition, but the effect was not statistically significant ($p = 0.079$). Again, this might be because of a power issue, and future research could help to provide clear results. The difference between self- and other-focused sharing was not significantly different between the two conditions, i.e. in the crowded condition the participants did not share significantly more self-presentational than other-focused content compared to the non-crowded condition.

This outcome might be due to the lack of significant difference in perceived control between the two conditions ($p = 0.342$). Previous research, which was also used as guidance for hypothesis development, has strongly associated crowdedness with the

perceived loss of control (e.g. Langer and Saegert, 1997, Cohen and Sherrod, 1978, Rodin et al., 1978). While the manipulation check confirmed that the participants in crowded condition perceived the room to be significantly more crowded, it is probable that this perceived crowdedness did not reach the extent at which it would have had an impact on the perceived control. Another possibility is that as the participants were university students from the same faculty, they might have for a great part known each other, and therefore not experienced as extensive loss of control and the discomfort as would have been necessary to have an effect on the results. Future research could study how being with friends impacts the effects of crowdedness, and if indeed being amongst friends or acquaintances increases the perceived control or protects against other negative effects, such as stress or hostility. Identification with the crowd has shown to make the environment feel less crowded and increase positive emotions (Novelli et al., 2013). When people perceive the crowd as members of the same (social) in-group category, the proximity they choose to have to others is greater (Novelli, Drury, and Reicher, 2010). Also, as Xu et al. (2012) have showed, voluntary presence in a crowded situation can have very different effects than an involuntary one. When the crowdedness is perceived as voluntary, the presence of others can be seen a sign of affiliation motivations. The ability to choose a seat can also enable the participants to experience more control (Xu et al., 2012). It is possible that the participants perceived their presence in the crowded situation to be voluntary, and that they had control over their seat, and therefore did not experience the predicted loss of control. One more possibility is that the students allocated blame for the crowdedness to the researchers, and not for the people actually present in the room, which has shown to decreased the experienced uncontrollability (Cohen and Sherrod, 1978).

While the relationship between different emotions and likelihood to share certain information on social media was not connected to the initial hypothesis or the initial objective of this research, they show some interesting correlations that might be of interest for future research. Feelings of hostility and irritability and being upset negatively correlated with being likely to share information about one's positive experiences, something that makes one look cool, or to post about a successful road trip (can be seen both as a positive experience and something that would make one look cool). This could be because an important reason to engage in self-enhancement (e.g. trying to make oneself look cool) is the desire that others perceive the person in a positive way (Berger, 2014). When feeling hostile towards others, or irritated, one might not be as interested in others' opinion. Also, social transmission is strongly connected with emotion (Berger and Milkman, 2012), and if the emotions that the experience evoked are suppressed by hostile and irritable emotions, people might not feel the same urge to share about the experience. For instance, if one felt very happy during a road trip, but is now feeling upset, he might not be as likely to share about the trip. This could be because the emotions he felt during the experience (trip) are no longer present, or are suppressed by being upset. People are more likely to share experiences by which they feel more emotionally affected (Harber and Cohen, 2011), and feelings of hostility and irritability might make ones positive experiences seem "further away", i.e. people do not connect with their positive experiences as much, or feel as emotional about them, when they are irritated of hostile.

Feelings of nervousness and embarrassment and feeling scared and afraid positively correlated with sharing certain useful and other-focused items, such as notes for midterms, a restaurant review and a recommendation for a grocery deliver service.

Feeling at ease negatively correlated with sharing notes for midterms and recommending a grocery delivery. A potential reason behind these findings could be that engaging in WOM communications with a social motive and social outcome could be used as means to ease these negative feelings. For instance, if one feels scared, it might make sense to forge stronger social bonds. As embarrassment is a social emotion, it might also provoke people to try to compensate (for what makes them feel embarrassed) by sharing something useful to others, or by exercising their ability to influence others by the means of a review or recommendation. Influencing others has been linked to responding to needs of belonging and self-worth (Sommer and Bourgeois, 2010). Online advice and information giving, such as posting reviews and recommendations, is a way to seek status, and higher status improves stress handling and decreases negative cognition (Lampel and Bhalla, 2007). High status can also be used to create admiration amongst people around, which can help to suppress the feelings of embarrassment and fear. When one feels at ease, there is no such strong need for social bonding and influencing others, which might explain the negative correlation between feeling at ease and sharing a recommendation about a grocery delivery service, an information the participants overall were fairly unlikely to share.

In sum, I propose the following agenda for future research: In order to reach a sufficient level of perceived crowdedness, it might be necessary to have more participants in the crowded condition. To enable or evoke the impact of crowdedness on perceived control, the researchers should ensure that the participants would not (at least for the major part) be acquainted with each other, and possibly not provide the participants means to exercise control, such as letting them choose their seats. Lastly, it might be necessary to have the participants to allocate the blame of crowdedness to the researchers instead of

the other participants (the people making the space crowded). The researchers should take this into account with their communications. For instance, saying something like "we are waiting for two more people", "we are going to be twelve people in total", or "we can only enter the room when everyone is present" might remind the participants that it is indeed the researcher who is responsible for placing so many people in the same room. If, instead, the communications would leave space for the idea that a random, large number of people just happened to sign and show up, the participants could be more likely to blame the other people in the room for the perceived crowdedness.

General discussion

Limitations

Due to administrative reasons, the research had to be conducted in three different rooms. This might have had an impact on the results that was not detected. The participants were likely to know each other before the experiment, and may have interacted among each other before arriving to do the experiment. They were also free to choose their seats amongst the ones indicated by the instructors (by placing a questionnaire in front of certain seats). These factors might have influenced the participants, particularly by influencing their perceived control and the positive and negative emotions they felt during the experiment. Lastly, the research environment was controlled and the participants were instructed not to interact with each other. While this control allows ruling out some external factors, it also makes the environment different

from the crowded situations that consumers are likely to experience more often. Namely, as interactions were not allowed, we could not study how the ability to communicate face-to-face amongst themselves, and the possibly to engage in traditional WOM communications at the moment, would affect the results.

Further research and managerial implications

Even though this research did not find evidence for how crowdedness affects the content of WOM communications, it is still an important and interesting topic for further research. The failure to find evidence supporting the hypothesis might have been due to the inability to affect the perceived control of the participants. The perceived crowdedness might not have reached an extent at which it would have impacted the perceived control. However, when that extent is reached, as it is reached by several situations in consumers' day-to-day life, it is important for marketers and businesses to know how it affects the content of WOM communications.

People communicate in social media while they are in crowded environments, and about things they see and experience in crowded environments. Today's mobile technologies and social networks allow companies to know where consumers are and when, which enables location-based targeting. Marketers can communicate the messages they see the most beneficial for consumers who are in different environments. If crowdedness is found to encourage self-focused sharing, it would be advantageous for marketers to create buzz with self-presentational content among the consumers who are in a crowded environment. For instance, brands could target consumers who are in a crowded malls and shopping centers by asking them to post a picture with the brand's product on social media. They might also provide information about self-presentational

products (Berger, 2014) that consumers could then share onwards. If crowdedness is found to make consumers more likely to share self-focused content over other-focused one, it might be beneficial to refrain from communicating to consumers in crowded environments about information they could mainly see as useful to others and not self-promotional (such as shareable discount coupons or product reviews and recommendations), as these messages would not be as likely to be passed on, and might be trumped by self-focused sharing.

The correlations found in the research might also offer interesting topics for future research. The correlation between the feelings of hostility, irritability and upset and the likelihood of sharing some self-presentational content aimed to make one look cool or to tell about a positive experience do not go with the theory of using self-enhancement and self-affirmation as means of dealing with unwanted emotions and stress (Sherman and Cohen, 2006).

It would be interesting to study the reason behind these correlations. If such feelings truly make consumers less likely to share certain self-presentational information, it is important for marketers to be able to identify in which situations to refrain from communicating such content. For instance, if consumers are feeling upset, irritable and hostile during the rush hour, they might not be willing to pass on brands' WOM content with self-promotional aspect (e.g. telling how they had fun in an event sponsored by the brand), even if the external conditions would suggest otherwise. Also, despite of it having been shown that certain content (e.g. arousing content, Berger, 2011) is overall more likely to be shared, if this content is self-presentational, there might be situations in which consumers might not share it due to their current emotions.

The correlations between feeling nervous, embarrassed, scared, and afraid, and being likely to share some useful and other-focused information might provide evidence for the theory that consumers compensate for knowledge discrepancies by aiming to prove their connoisseurship via WOM communications (Berger, 2014), and for the theories that social sharing is used to forge social bonds (Alexandrov et al., 2013), which might be in more need when being scared and afraid. It would be interesting to further study the relationship between the other-focused WOM communications and such feelings. This could provide marketers with better understanding of when to offer consumers opportunities to share useful items such as shareable coupons, reviews and recommendations. For instance, if some new experiences make consumers feel afraid or nervous, they might be more willing to write reviews to make themselves feel better, possibly by reaffirming their self-worth and ability to influence others (Sommer and Bourgeois, 2010). A company that offers unconventional and extreme activities and experiences (e.g. an extreme sports service or a luxury deal made affordable for consumers not normally in the budget range) could exploit the feelings or nervousness and ask consumers to post a review or rate the service at the times when those emotions are still present (e.g. the consumers could rate the lodging services while waiting for the extreme activity).

The effect of crowdedness on the content of WOM communications is a little known but relevant topic for both researchers and marketers, and therefore should be studied further. In order to successfully evoke the impact of the crowdedness, future researchers should aim to reach a level of perceived crowdedness that would have an effect on the perceived control. The impact of voluntary crowdedness should be taken into consideration. It should also be noted that providing the participants with means to

exercise control (such as an opportunity to select their seats) might have an effect on the outcome (e.g. it might restore the perceived control). Also, the effect of the participants knowing each other, or being able to make acquaintance and interact with each other before the experiment, should be taken into the consideration, and if desired, limited.

Conclusion

Word-of-mouth is an essential part of today's consumer communications, and there is still a gap in the research when it comes to the context in which WOM takes place. Businesses and marketers would highly benefit from bridging this gap. Also, consumers' likelihood of sharing self- or other-focused content is an interesting topic to study further, as it has important business implications. Even though this study did not support my hypothesis, it still suggests interesting avenues for future research on WOM communications and behavior, such as the role of different emotions for information sharing.

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