The Effect of Need for Uniqueness on Word Of Mouth

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The authors study a psychosocial cost associated with positive word of mouth (WOM): positive WOM can decrease the uniqueness of possessions, which hurts high-uniqueness individuals. Thus, high- (vs. low-) uniqueness individuals are less willing to generate positive WOM for publicly consumed products that they own. However, high uniqueness does not decrease willingness to generate WOM for privately consumed products (studies 1 and 2) or for products that are not owned (study 2). Study 2 also reveals that the effect of uniqueness is more pronounced for WOM that includes positive recommendations, compared to WOM that only contains product details. Exploring the process, study 3a illustrates that WOM recommendations are perceived to be more persuasive for public (vs. private) products. The cost of positive WOM is shown in study 3b, where others’ adoption of public products decreases high-uniqueness consumers’ likelihood of adoption. Consistent with this process, study 4 shows that high- (vs. low-) uniqueness consumers are less willing to recommend a public product to others, but are as willing to discuss product details. Study 5 analyzes content of real-world WOM and finds evidence that supports these results.

Keywords: word of mouth, need for uniqueness, market mavenism, social influence
Prior research has recognized exchange as the central phenomenon in the study of marketing (Bagozzi 1975) and that a significant proportion of marketing communications involves face-to-face interaction (Hulbert and Capon 1972). Word of mouth (WOM) communication is central to the exchange process as consumers often rely upon others for assistance with purchases, especially for products high in financial or psychic risk (Gershoff and Johar 2006). Several studies have empirically demonstrated that WOM can be more persuasive than more traditional media channels (Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Herr, Kardes, and Kim 1991). Indeed, Dichter (1966, 166) argues that “advertising cannot replace interpersonal influence.”

While much is known about the outcomes of WOM, less is known about the motivational drivers of WOM, that is, why consumers choose to engage in WOM (cf. Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998). Our research focuses on the fundamental drivers underlying WOM. Specifically, prior research has focused on benefits of WOM for endorsers rather than on costs (cf. Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993). We explore a psychosocial cost associated with a consumer’s decision to engage in positive WOM about products. While providing WOM may be attractive for a number of reasons, we demonstrate that consumers who promote a product through WOM may also decrease the uniqueness of their possessions. Thus, positive WOM may hurt consumers who have high need for uniqueness. Additionally, we expect this social cost of decreased uniqueness to vary across contexts. We propose that the detrimental effect of WOM (in terms of its potential to decrease the uniqueness of products) is greater for publicly (vs. privately) consumed products (Bourne 1957), greater when the product is owned (vs. not owned), and greater when the WOM includes positive reviews and purchase recommendations, compared to when the WOM only contains product details.
This research makes three important contributions. First, it responds to calls for research regarding consumers’ motivations for WOM. Specifically, Bagozzi (1975, 39) called for research to “search for specific social and psychological processes that create and resolve marketing exchanges.” More recently, Godes et al. (2005, 419/423) stated that “much research is needed to investigate the fundamental motives behind the individual’s proclivity for communication as a function of the individual’s characteristics” and to answer the question: “Who should the firm target to facilitate the spread of information?” Thus, our findings help firms target the appropriate consumers to help them increase WOM.

Second, this research responds to a call for research regarding the types of products people will talk about with others. Brown and Reingen (1987, 361) state that “an enhanced understanding of the social influence processes in consumer behavior may simply be obtained by examining which products or services consumers are more likely to talk about.” We study the effects of need for uniqueness on WOM for different product categories to address this issue.

Third, this research explores the effect of individual and contextual differences on consumers’ willingness to engage in different types of WOM. Specifically, we consider how consumers’ need for uniqueness, the product category, and product ownership influence their willingness to engage in positive WOM (providing positive product reviews and purchase recommendations) versus simply providing product details. We therefore provide a clearer picture on WOM consequences, as the former type of WOM may be more persuasive and effective in increasing purchase intentions than the latter (e.g., Keiningham et al 2008).

Our propositions are fleshed out in the following theoretical development. We test these propositions by manipulating (study 1) and measuring (study 2) consumers’ need for uniqueness, demonstrating how uniqueness affects WOM for different product categories. In study 2 we
demonstrate that the effect of uniqueness on willingness to provide positive WOM about public discretionary products occurs only when the consumer owns the product. Study 2 also reveals that the effect of uniqueness is more pronounced for WOM that includes positive recommendations, compared to WOM that only contains product details. Exploring the process, study 3a illustrates that WOM recommendations are perceived to be more persuasive for public (vs. private) products. The cost of positive WOM is shown in study 3b, where others’ adoption of public products decreases high-uniqueness consumers’ likelihood of adoption. Consistent with this process, study 4 reveals that high- (vs. low-) uniqueness consumers are less willing to recommend a product to others, but are as willing to discuss product details. Study 5 analyzes content of real-world WOM, corroborating these results. We conclude with implications and a discussion of the drivers of WOM.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Motivations of Positive WOM

The decision of whether to transmit information to others lies within the individual (Dichter 1966). According to exchange theory, perceived costs and benefits drive an individual’s decision to engage in WOM (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993; Gatignon and Robertson 1986). Indeed, an individual can satisfy social and psychological needs by influencing others’ behavior. Next, we discuss these benefits and costs of WOM.
**Benefits of WOM.** Prior research has identified consumers who are more likely to engage in positive WOM, namely, market mavens. Feick and Price (1987) introduced the concept of the market maven as an individual who is knowledgeable about a variety of products, and shares this information with other consumers. Market mavens are motivated by a greater sense of obligation to talk, a desire to help others, and a feeling of pleasure from telling others about products. Consumers may also engage in WOM to justify decisions (generate approval from others) and to achieve social status and power (Gatignon and Robertson 1986). Other findings confirm that consumers may transmit information because they find it intrinsically satisfying or because they have a helpful social personality (Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster 1998). In summary, consumers engage in WOM because of social or psychological benefits in doing so. In addition to these benefits, however, there may also be costs of engaging in WOM.

**Costs of WOM.** The few costs of WOM that have been identified in the literature include incurred social obligations and time commitments, and risk of communicating inappropriate advice (Gatignon and Robertson 1986). Additionally, Frenzen and Nakamoto (1993) demonstrate that consumers consider the opportunity costs of telling another person about a sale. For instance, if the supply of sale items is limited, consumers are less likely to talk about the sale with others than if the supply is unlimited. In the current research, our goal is to demonstrate that another individual difference, the need for uniqueness, affects perceived costs of generating WOM. We propose that there is a social cost of WOM for consumers who have a high need for uniqueness. In particular, providing other consumers with positive evaluations about a product increases the likelihood of those consumers adopting the product, thereby decreasing the uniqueness of that product. Next, we explore this cost in the context of the need for uniqueness construct.
Need for uniqueness has been identified and measured as an individual-level trait in prior research (Lynn and Harris 1997; Snyder and Fromkin 1977; Tian, Bearden, and Hunter 2001). One of the consequences of high need for uniqueness is the desire to possess unique products (Simonson and Nowlis 2000), as these products provide differentiation from other people. For example, high-uniqueness consumers are likely to prefer distinct product designs (Bloch 1995) and attributes “because they define the person as different from members of his or her reference group” (Snyder and Fromkin 1980, 107). High-uniqueness consumers are more drawn to scarce products than low-uniqueness consumers, and the former will exert more effort to own products that are innovative and hard-to-obtain (Lynn 1992; Snyder 1992). Need for uniqueness is a personality trait related to self-presentation, and high-uniqueness individuals are more likely to choose options that haven’t been chosen by others (Worchel, Lee, and Adewole 1975).

In addition to increased likelihood of choosing unique or different products, high-uniqueness consumers may also decrease consumption of a product if it becomes commonplace. This avoidance of overly popular products is often labeled as a snob or a reverse-bandwagon effect (Granovetter and Soong 1986). Consistent with this effect of need for uniqueness, we expect that consumers may be unwilling to provide positive WOM about a product for fear that others will buy it, thus decreasing its exclusivity. Products that make a person unique may attract other people (Fisher and Price 1992), and high-uniqueness consumers may feel a threat to their identity if others become similar to them (Berger and Heath 2007; Tian et al. 2001).

Consequently, high-uniqueness consumers will be reluctant to promote a product for fear of it becoming common. This effect of need for uniqueness on WOM may, however, vary across
products. That is, increased adoption may hurt a consumer’s unique image to a greater extent for certain categories of products than for others. Furthermore, we do not expect need for uniqueness to affect WOM for products not owned by the consumer. Importantly, the persuasiveness of WOM may also vary as a function of its content, with WOM that is purely informative (only containing product details) being less persuasive than WOM that includes positive evaluation and buying recommendations. We next discuss these moderators in greater detail.

**Moderators of the Effect of Need for Uniqueness: Product Category, Ownership, and WOM Type**

Consumers often buy products and brands for what they mean, rather than solely for what they can do (Belk 1988; Berger and Heath 2007). The extent to which meanings of brands are affected by reference groups depends on two forms of conspicuousness: publicly versus privately consumed products, and discretionary versus necessary products (Bourne 1957). We focus on discretionary products because peer influence is particularly relevant for purchase of these products, regardless of them being publicly or privately consumed (Childers and Rao 1992).

The effect of need for uniqueness is expected to vary across public versus private discretionary products. Products consumed in public are seen by others and are important for identity communication (Childers and Rao 1992). Indeed, Ratner and Kahn (2002) confirm that consumers seek greater variety for publicly (vs. privately) consumed products. Because high-uniqueness consumers value unique products (Snyder and Fromkin 1980), factors that increase adoption of a conspicuous product will decrease the value of the product for these consumers (as demonstrated by Amaldoss and Jain 2005). Consistent with prior research, we expect that the effect of need for uniqueness will depend on whether WOM is for a public or a private...
discretionary product. Specifically, because consumption of public (vs. private) products is more conspicuous, the willingness to provide positive WOM for these products may be lowered to a greater extent by need for uniqueness. As private products are less visible to others, we propose that the effect of need for uniqueness on WOM for these products will be less pronounced.

In addition, as a facet of social influence, positive WOM may be more persuasive for public (versus private) products, leading to greater likelihood of adoption by others (e.g., Bearden and Etzel 1982). This would increase the costs of positive WOM by high-uniqueness consumers for public versus private products. Thus, we expect the product category to moderate the effect of need for uniqueness on willingness to engage in positive WOM. Specifically, high-uniqueness consumers will be less likely to engage in positive WOM for public (vs. private) products because of the greater social cost (in terms of decreased uniqueness) associated with the former. In contrast, low-uniqueness consumers will be as likely to promote both public and private products. In other words:

**H1:** Higher need for uniqueness will decrease willingness to provide positive word of mouth (WOM) to a greater extent for public (vs. private) discretionary products owned by consumers.

Note that we expect the effect of need for uniqueness on WOM to exist only when the consumer *owns* the public discretionary product, and not when the consumer does not own the product, and has no intention of purchasing it. In the latter case, where WOM is informational, there is no cost to the consumer in terms of decreased uniqueness of owned products. Thus:
H2: In the domain of public products, high need for uniqueness will decrease willingness to provide positive WOM for owned products but not for products that are not owned.

The persuasiveness of WOM, in terms of convincing others to buy the product, may also depend on WOM content. Specifically, WOM that includes positive product reviews and purchase recommendations is more likely to lead to product purchase than is WOM that only contains product details. Both types of WOM, however, allow the consumer to earn social capital (Feick and Price 1987). While prior research on positive WOM has often considered an instance of WOM (or willingness to generate WOM) as the unit of analysis, such an approach ignores the nuances between evaluative versus informational differences which are clearly important in social influence (e.g., Park and Lessig 1977). Indeed, recent debate about WOM content has focused on this distinction (Keiningham et al. 2008). As WOM that includes positive evaluations may be more persuasive than WOM that only contains product details, for high-uniqueness consumers, the former is potentially more costly than the latter. Thus, these consumers may be less willing to provide positive evaluations than product details. Formally:

H3: In the domain of owned public products, high need for uniqueness will decrease willingness to provide WOM that includes positive evaluations but will not decrease willingness to provide WOM that only contains product details.

We test these hypotheses in five studies. Studies 1 and 2 reveal that among people who own a product, uniqueness decreases willingness to engage in positive WOM more for public (vs. private) products (hypothesis 1). In addition, study 2 demonstrates that the effect of
uniqueness on willingness to provide positive WOM is attenuated when the product is not owned (hypothesis 2). Consistent with hypothesis 3, these effects are significant for WOM that contains positive product evaluations, but not for WOM that only contains product information.

Study 3 explores the process underlying these effects. In study 3a, individuals report WOM containing positive evaluations to be more persuasive than WOM that only contains product details. Individuals also report that such positive WOM is more persuasive for public (vs. private) products. In study 3b, high- (vs. low-) uniqueness individuals are less likely to purchase a public product after it is adopted by others. This difference is attenuated for private products. Taken together, studies 3a and 3b reveal that the expected cost of providing positive WOM is higher for high- (vs. low-) uniqueness consumers when talking about private products.

Study 4 demonstrates the effect of high- (vs. low-) uniqueness on willingness to provide positive WOM evaluations versus WOM about product details, supporting hypothesis 3 in a between-subjects setting. Study 5 analyzes content of reported WOM and finds additional evidence supporting hypothesis 3 in real-world data. These studies are discussed next.

**STUDY 1: EFFECT OF MANIPULATED NEED FOR UNIQUENESS ON LIKELIHOOD OF POSITIVE WOM**

*Participants, Method, and Design*

We paid 84 non-student consumers a token amount to complete a survey. Seven people did not follow elaboration instructions; thus, all analyses are for 77 participants (57% female, M_{age} = 32 years). Prior to the WOM scenario, we manipulated participants’ uniqueness to be high or low, between subjects, via an elaboration exercise. Participants in the high-uniqueness
condition were asked to elaborate on the importance of individuality (i.e., being different from others), while those in the low-uniqueness condition were asked to elaborate on the importance of conformity (i.e., being similar to others). On the next page, all participants read a description of a fictitious brand of sandals (appendix A, panel A). We employed a usage-listing task to manipulate the use to be public or private, between subjects. Participants in the public-use condition listed situations in which they would wear these sandals when other people could see them, while those in the private-use condition listed usage situations where no one could see the sandals. Thus, the study was a 2 (uniqueness: high, low) x 2 (use: public, private) full factorial between-subjects design. All participants read that they owned the sandals, and rated their willingness to generate positive WOM (will you tell friends and acquaintances positive things about the sandals? 1 = no, 9 = yes).

Manipulation Checks

Uniqueness (high, low) manipulation. We collected additional data to check whether the individuality versus conformity elaboration tasks affected uniqueness. We paid 69 non-student consumers a token amount to participate. Six participants did not complete the task; all analyses are for 63 people (54% female, M age = 29 years). About half of the participants completed the high-uniqueness task (individuality) while the rest completed the low-uniqueness task (conformity). All participants then completed the uniqueness scale (Tian et al. 2001) and the mavenism scale (Feick and Price 1987). As expected, the elaboration task significantly affects uniqueness (M high-uniqueness = 4.07 vs. M low-uniqueness = 3.24, F (1, 61) = 9.93, p < .005), but does not affect mavenism (M high-uniqueness = 4.51 vs. M low-uniqueness = 4.40, F (1, 61) = .07, NS).
Use (public, private) manipulation. We also confirmed that use-listings varied product perceptions. We paid 104 non-student participants a token amount to complete the survey. Four participants did not complete the task; all analyses are for 100 people (55% female, M age = 25 years). Half of the participants listed situations in which they would wear the sandals in public, while the remaining participants listed private usage situations. All participants then reported the likelihood of (a) other people seeing them using the sandals, and (b) using the sandals in places other than the home (1 = not at all likely, 9 = very likely; r = .84, p < .0001; averaged to form a public use measure). As expected, the use-listing task significantly affected perceptions of public use (M listed public use = 7.04 vs. M listed private use = 5.71), F (1, 98) = 9.62, p < .005.

Product characteristics. Participants in the study reported product perceptions (scales anchored by 1-9). Importantly, use-listing did not affect desirability (not at all desirable - very desirable; M public-use = 5.50 vs. M private-use = 5.55; F (1, 74) = .01, NS), perceptions of being discretionary (see study 1; M public-use = 5.79 vs. M private-use = 6.23; F (1, 74) = 1.34, NS), or of being a necessity (see study 1; M public-use = 3.15 vs. M private-use = 3.01; F (1, 74) = .08, NS).

Results

We conducted an ANOVA with willingness to generate positive WOM as the dependent measure and uniqueness (high, low) and use (private, public) as predictors. Consistent with hypothesis 1, we find a significant uniqueness x use interaction, F (1, 73) = 4.44, p < .05 (see figure 1). In the public-use condition, high- (vs. low-) uniqueness participants were less likely to engage in positive WOM (M high-uniqueness = 5.69 vs. M low-uniqueness = 7.00), F (1, 73) = 4.97, p < .05. However, uniqueness did not affect WOM for private use (M high-uniqueness = 7.24 vs. M low-
uniqueness = 6.85), F (1, 73) = .50, NS. Among high-uniqueness participants, those in the public-(vs. private-) use condition were less likely to engage in WOM, F (1, 73) = 7.45, p < .01. In contrast, (public vs. private) use did not affect low-uniqueness participants, F (1, 73) = .06, NS.

< Insert Figure 1 about here >

**Discussion**

We find that high (vs. low) uniqueness decreases willingness to engage in positive WOM for the product that is perceived to be publicly used. Controlling for mavenism and desirability does not change the pattern of results. Study 1 used a single-item measure of likelihood to engage in positive WOM. However, WOM can have many dimensions. For instance, WOM can be informative by providing product details, or it can be evaluative by providing positive recommendations (e.g., Keiningham et al. 2008). Thus, in subsequent studies we differentiate between WOM that provides product details and WOM that provides a recommendation. In study 2, we use a multiple-item WOM measure and study these two types of WOM (details vs. recommendation) in a within-subjects design.

**STUDY 2: EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF UNIQUENESS ON TWO TYPES OF WOM: RECOMMENDATIONS VERSUS DETAILS**

**Participants, Method, and Design**

We asked 176 undergraduates to complete the survey in return for a token payment or as part of a research requirement (responses did not differ across the two groups). Six students did not complete the survey; thus, all analyses are for 170 people. These participants read a detailed
description of a new consumer electronics product. This product was manipulated between subjects to be either the Apple iPhone (public product) or Apple TV (private product). The description listed several positive features, a few negative features, and a picture, stating that the product is now available on the market (see appendix A, panels B and C). We also manipulated product ownership between subjects. Half of the participants read that they had bought the product, while the rest read that although they were intrigued by the product, they didn’t intend to buy it. Thus, the study was a 2 (product: public, private) x 2 (ownership: yes, no) full factorial between subjects design with random assignment.

All participants completed a series of items measuring their willingness to provide WOM (Harrison-Walker 2001; Moldovan, Goldenberg, and Chattopadhyay 2006). We analyzed the responses separately across two sets of items. The first set of items measured participants’ willingness to discuss details (I will talk to many people about the product; I will provide as many details as I can about the product; 1 = disagree, 7 = agree; r = .49, p < .0001). The second set of items measured participants’ willingness to recommend (I have good things to say about the product; I will recommend that others buy the product; 1 = disagree, 7 = agree; how likely are you to tell friends and acquaintances positive things about the product? 1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely; α = .84). Note that the last item in this WOM recommendation scale is the same as that used to measure willingness to provide positive WOM in study 1. Participants also completed the uniqueness scale (Tian et al. 2001) and the mavenism scale (Feick and Price 1987). We conducted a median split on these scores to classify participants as high or low in need for uniqueness, and high or low in market mavenism, respectively; using continuous measures revealed similar results (reported in the footnotes). We first present the results without controlling for mavenism. Later, we discuss the effects of mavenism when it is included.
Manipulation Check

The public product was perceived as being significantly more likely to be used and seen publicly than the private product (average of: if you owned this product, how likely would you be to use it in places other than your home; how likely would it be that your friends would see you using it? 1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely; r = .60, p < .001; M_{public} = 6.64 vs. M_{private} = 4.14), F (1, 168) = 218.65, p < .0001. Importantly, there were no differences in perceptions of the product being a discretionary buy (average of two items: Is this a product that would be nice to have but not essential? In your opinion, is this product a luxury? 1 = no, 7 = yes; r = .37, p < .001; M_{public} = 6.02 vs. M_{private} = 5.90, F (1, 168) = .57, NS), or in perceptions of innovativeness (average of: how innovative is this product; 1 = not at all innovative, 7 = very innovative; does this product offer features that are not currently available in the marketplace? 1= no, 7 = yes; r = .45, p < .001; M_{public} = 4.95 vs. M_{private} = 4.83, F (1, 168) = .27, NS), desirability (interest in purchasing the product; M_{public} = 4.13 vs. M_{private} = 3.78, F (1, 168) = 1.39, NS), and availability (M_{public} = 4.90 vs. M_{private} = 4.43, F (1, 168) = 2.12, NS).

Results

Willingness to recommend. We conducted an ANOVA with willingness to recommend as the dependent measure and uniqueness (high, low), product (public, private) and ownership (yes, no) as predictors. The uniqueness x product x ownership interaction was significant, F (1, 162) = 5.23, p < .05. Consistent with hypothesis 1, uniqueness decreased recommendations for owned public products. Specifically, among participants who owned the public product (figure 2, panel
A), those with high (vs. low) need for uniqueness were less willing to recommend the product \( (M_{\text{high-uniqueness}} = 4.30 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{low-uniqueness}} = 5.18) \), \( F (1, 162) = 5.11, p < .05 \). Uniqueness did not affect willingness to recommend for participants who owned the private product \( (M_{\text{high-uniqueness}} = 5.00 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{low-uniqueness}} = 4.97; F (1, 162) = .01, \text{NS}) \), nor did it affect recommendations from those who did not own the product (figure 2, panel B; \( p's > .25 \)). Among participants who saw the public product, the ownership x uniqueness interaction was significant, \( F (1, 80) = 5.44, p < .05 \), supporting hypothesis 2.¹

Willingness to discuss details. We conducted an ANOVA with willingness to discuss details as the dependent measure and uniqueness (high, low), product (public, private) and ownership (yes, no) as predictors. In contrast to the effects of uniqueness on recommendations, participants’ willingness to discuss product details was not significantly affected by uniqueness \( (p's > .15; \text{figure 2, panels C and D}) \). Specifically, focused contrasts revealed that uniqueness had no significant effect on willingness to discuss product details among participants who owned the public product (figure 2, panel C; \( M_{\text{high-uniqueness}} = 4.45 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{low-uniqueness}} = 4.87) \), \( F (1, 162) = .85, \text{NS} \). A main effect of ownership indicated that participants who owned the product were significantly more likely to discuss its details \( (M_{\text{not owned}} = 3.78 \text{ versus } M_{\text{owned}} = 4.52) \), \( F (1, 162) = 13.09, p < .0005 \).

¹ Using a continuous measure of uniqueness revealed similar results for the willingness to recommend dependent measure. The uniqueness x product x ownership interaction was significant, \( F (1, 162) = 6.92, p = .01 \). Among those who saw the public product, the ownership x uniqueness interaction was significant, \( F (1, 80) = 5.71, p < .05 \). Finally, among those who owned the public product, uniqueness had a significant negative effect on willingness to recommend the product, unstandardized \( b = -.56, F (1, 39) = 7.55, p < .01 \). In contrast, uniqueness did not decrease willingness to recommend for people who owned the private product, \( F (1, 40) = .10, \text{NS} \).

² This effect was also not significant when we used a continuous measure of uniqueness, \( F (1, 39) = 1.49, \text{NS} \).
Effect of mavenism. The preceding analyses remain unchanged if we include mavenism. Consistent with prior research, participants scoring high (vs. low) on mavenism report a greater willingness to recommend (M\text{high-mavenism} = 4.83 vs. M\text{low-mavenism} = 4.52), F (1, 161) = 4.30, \(p < .05\). In addition, participants scoring high (vs. low) on mavenism are more willing to discuss product details (M\text{high-mavenism} = 4.48 vs. M\text{low-mavenism} = 3.79), F (1, 161) = 9.80, \(p < .005\).³

Discussion

The results indicate that among people who own a public product, high- (vs. low-) uniqueness consumers are less willing to recommend the product. However, uniqueness does not affect recommendation of private products, or of products that are not owned. In contrast to the effect of uniqueness of WOM recommendations, participants’ willingness to discuss details is not significantly affected by uniqueness. Thus, participants may gain social capital by discussing product details with others without increasing product adoption. While study 2 identifies differences in behavior relating to recommendations versus discussing details, we note that all the items were answered by each participant (i.e., these were repeated measures) and that the items were not counterbalanced. Thus, the varying effect of uniqueness on these two types of WOM may have been attenuated by carryover effects from responses about details to those for recommendations. This design issue was a consequence of a post-hoc analysis for the two types of WOM, which was spurred by insightful suggestions of the review team. To address this issue, in study 4 we manipulate the type of WOM (details versus recommendation) in a between-subjects design.

³ A continuous measure of mavenism revealed similar results. Mavenism increased willingness to recommend, unstandardized \(b = .23\), F (1, 161) = 10.07, \(p < .005\). Mavenism also increased willingness to discuss details, \(b = .36\), F (1, 161) = 19.23, \(p < .0001\).
Next, we explore the process underlying the effect of uniqueness on willingness to generate WOM. In study 3a, we explicitly test the assumption that WOM that provides positive recommendations is more likely to affect adoption than WOM that only provides details. Furthermore, we investigate whether this effect of type of WOM (recommendation versus details) varies by product category. Prior research has shown that social influence is stronger for public versus private products (e.g., Breaden and Etzel 1982). Thus, the persuasiveness of WOM recommendations may be greater for public versus private products. Consequently, WOM recommendations about private products may not be costly (in terms of decreased uniqueness) for high-uniqueness consumers.

**STUDY 3A: PERSUASIVENESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS VERSUS DETAILS: MODERATING ROLE OF PRODUCT CATEGORY**

**Participants, Method, and Design**

We paid 125 undergraduates a token amount to complete the study. Five participants did not complete the survey; thus, all analyses are for 120 students. Participants read a scenario describing an interaction between two friends, A and B, who are also co-workers. In the scenario, participants read that A recently bought a product. This product, whose description was included in the scenario, was manipulated between subjects. Half the participants read about a new laptop (public; appendix A, panel D), while the rest read about a new mattress (private; appendix A, panel E). Both products were described with novel and innovative features. All participants read that one day B finds out about A’s purchase and asks A about it. We also manipulated the type of WOM, between subjects. Half the participants (those in the recommend
condition) read that A tells B many good things about the product, finally recommending that B buy it. The remaining participants (those in the details condition) read that A tells B many details about the product, along with information such as where A bought it. All participants then reported B’s likelihood of buying the product (1 = not at all, 7 = very likely), which was used as a measure of the perceived persuasiveness of the WOM. Thus, the study was a 2 (product: private, public) x 2 (type of WOM: recommend, details) full-factorial between-subjects design.

All participants also completed measures of product characteristics, mavenism (Feick and Price 1987), and uniqueness (avoidance of similarity dimension; Tian et al. 2001). Participant’s traits did not affect the perceived likelihood of B buying the product. In other words, participants did not project their own uniqueness or mavenism tendencies onto the WOM target (i.e., person B in the scenario). Consequently, controlling for uniqueness and mavenism doesn’t change the results, and these are omitted from the analyses.

**Manipulation Check**

The public (vs. private) product was rated significantly more likely to be used publicly (how likely would you be to use it in places other than home; 1 = not at all, 7 = very likely; M<sub>public</sub> = 5.92 vs. M<sub>private</sub> = 2.38; F (1, 118) = 176.24, p < .0001) and also to be seen publicly (how likely is it that your friends would see you using it? 1 = not at all, 7 = very likely; M<sub>public</sub> = 5.77 vs. M<sub>private</sub> = 3.45; F (1, 118) = 59.82, p < .0001). Importantly, there were no differences in perceptions of the product being discretionary (is this product a luxury? 1 = no, 7 = yes; M<sub>public</sub> = 5.98 vs. M<sub>private</sub> = 6.27, F (1, 118) = 1.94, NS), or in perceptions of innovativeness (1 = not at all, 7 = very innovative; M<sub>public</sub> = 5.10 vs. M<sub>private</sub> = 5.38, F (1, 118) = 1.76, NS ), or desirability (1 = not at all, 7 = very desirable, M<sub>public</sub> = 4.82 vs. M<sub>private</sub> = 4.48, F (1, 118) = 1.75, NS).
Results and Discussion

We conducted an ANOVA with the persuasiveness of the WOM (B’s purchase likelihood) as the dependent measure and the product (public, private) and type of WOM (buy recommendation, product details) as predictors. A significant product x type of WOM interaction revealed that product category moderated the effect of buy recommendations, F (1, 116) = 4.37, \(p < .05\) (figure 3). Specifically, the WOM was judged more persuasive when A recommended the public (vs. private) product (M_public = 5.73 vs. M_private = 5.10), F (1, 116) = 4.04, \(p < .05\). In contrast, product category did not affect WOM persuasiveness when A only provided product details (M_public = 4.73 vs. M_private = 5.03), F (1, 116) = .90, NS. Pre-planned contrasts also revealed that, for the public product, recommendations were more persuasive than details, F (1, 116) = 10.05, \(p < .005\). However, type of WOM (recommendation, details) did not affect B’s purchase likelihood for the private product F (1, 116) = .04, NS. Finally, the main effect of type of WOM was significant, with recommendations (vs. details) more likely to lead to a purchase (M_recommendation = 5.42 vs. M_details = 4.88; F (1, 116) = 5.71, \(p < .05\)), qualified by the interaction.

< Insert Figure 3 about here >

Results from study 3a suggest that WOM is more likely to be costly for high-uniqueness participants (in terms of decreased uniqueness of products) when (a) the WOM includes positive recommendations (vs. only details), and (b) the WOM relates to public (vs. private) products. In study 3b, we explore a different facet of this process by studying how adoption of products by others affects high- and low-uniqueness individuals’ purchase likelihood. We use the public and private products pre-tested in study 3a for this investigation.
STUDY 3B: EFFECT OF UNIQUENESS ON BUYING PRODUCTS ADOPTED BY OTHERS: MODERATING ROLE OF PRODUCT CATEGORY

Participants, Method, and Design

We asked 120 undergraduates to complete a short survey in return for a token payment, or for refreshments (difference in compensation did not affect responses). Four participants did not complete the survey; thus, all results are for 116 students. In the survey, participants read a description about a new product and a scenario. Similar to study 3a, the product description was manipulated between subjects. Half the participants read about a publicly consumed product (laptop: appendix A, panel D) while the rest read about a privately consumed product (mattress: appendix A, panel E). Manipulation checks revealed that while both products were perceived to be equally innovative, the former was perceived to be significantly more likely to be consumed in public, and to be observed by friends, than the latter (these checks are reported in study 3a).

All participants then read that they had been thinking of buying the product. In order to frame the purchase as being discretionary, participants read that while the product was not absolutely necessary, it would be nice to have. Participants also read that while talking to a friend they find out that the friend had recently bought the product. Following this scenario, participants reported their likelihood of buying the product (1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely). Participants also completed the CNFU - avoidance of similarity scale (Tian et al. 2001) on the next page. We conducted a median split to characterize participants as high- or low-uniqueness; using a continuous uniqueness measure revealed similar results (reported in footnotes). Thus, the study was a 2 (product type: public, private) x 2 (uniqueness: high, low) between-subjects design. Participants also completed the mavenism scale (Feick and Price 1987). Mavenism did not affect purchase likelihood and is excluded; including it does not change the reported results.
Results and Discussion

We conducted an ANOVA with the participants’ purchase likelihood as the dependent measure and the product (private, public) and the participant’s uniqueness (high, low) as predictors. A significant product x uniqueness interaction revealed that product category moderated the effect of uniqueness on purchase likelihood, $F(1, 112) = 4.94, p < .05$ (figure 4). Specifically, in conditions where a public product was adopted by a friend, high-uniqueness individuals were less likely to buy the product than low-uniqueness individuals ($M_{\text{high-uniqueness}} = 4.38$ vs. $M_{\text{low-uniqueness}} = 5.30$), $F(1, 112) = 5.66, p < .05$. In contrast, uniqueness did not significantly affect purchase likelihood for the private product ($M_{\text{high-uniqueness}} = 5.38$ vs. $M_{\text{low-uniqueness}} = 5.07$), $F(1, 112) = .61$, NS. Pre-planned contrasts revealed that, following adoption by a friend, high-uniqueness participants who saw a public (vs. private) product were significantly less likely to buy, $F(1, 112) = 6.55, p = .01$. For low-uniqueness participants, however, purchase likelihood did not vary significantly across product category, $F(1, 112) = .34$, NS.4

< Insert Figure 4 about here >

Results from study 3b reveal that adoption by a friend decreases the likelihood of high-uniqueness individuals buying a public product. Taken together, studies 3a and 3b paint a picture in which high-uniqueness individuals have a disincentive to provide WOM that includes positive recommendations for public products because such recommendations are likely to persuade

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4 Using a continuous measure of uniqueness revealed similar results. The product x uniqueness interaction was significant, $F(1, 112) = 5.77, p < .05$. Among participants who saw the public product, uniqueness decreased likelihood of purchase, unstandardized $b = -.51, F(1, 57) = 8.86, p < .005$. In contrast, uniqueness did not affect purchase likelihood for participants who saw the private product, $F(1, 55) = .23$, NS.
others to buy the product (study 3a), which decreases attractiveness of the product for the WOM agent (study 3b). In contrast, providing WOM that only contains product details is relatively less persuasive, and is therefore less likely to lead to adoption of the public product. In study 4, we experimentally test whether uniqueness lowers willingness to provide WOM recommendations for a publicly consumed product.

**STUDY 4: EFFECT OF UNIQUENESS ON WILLINGNESS TO RECOMMEND VERSUS DISCUSS DETAILS FOR PUBLIC PRODUCT**

**Participants, Method, and Design**

We asked 118 undergraduates to complete a survey in return for refreshments or a token payment; responses did not differ by compensation. All participants read a scenario in which, after having searched for quite a while, they had recently purchased a pair of sneakers. Participants read that the sneakers feel really good and that they anticipate wearing the sneakers often. They wear the sneakers to class, and on the way a friend notices the sneakers and asks about them. We manipulated the type of provided information between subjects. Half the participants were asked how likely they were to recommend that the friend buy the sneakers (1 = not at all, 7 = very likely). The remaining participants were asked how likely they were to tell the friend lots of details about the sneakers (1 = not at all, 7 = very likely). Thus, the study was a 2 (type of WOM: recommend, details) between-subjects design. On the following pages participants also completed the mavenism scale (Feick and Price 1987) and uniqueness scale (avoidance of similarity dimension; Tian et al. 2001). We conducted a median split on these
scales to characterize participants as high or low on mavenism and uniqueness; using continuous measures revealed similar results (see footnotes). We first report the results without including mavenism. Subsequently, we discuss the effect of mavenism when it is included in the analysis.

Results

We conducted an ANOVA with willingness to generate WOM as the dependent measure and type of WOM (recommend, details) and uniqueness (high, low) as predictors. A significant uniqueness x type of WOM interaction supported hypothesis 3, $F(1, 114) = 8.10, p = .005$ (see figure 5). High- (vs. low-) uniqueness participants were less willing to recommend the product ($M_{high-uniqueness} = 4.22$ vs. $M_{low-uniqueness} = 5.57$), $F(1, 114) = 11.09, p = .001$. However, uniqueness did not affect participants’ willingness to discuss product details ($M_{high-uniqueness} = 5.70$ vs. $M_{low-uniqueness} = 5.49$), $F(1, 114) = .35$, NS. Pre-planned contrasts revealed that among high-uniqueness participants, recommendations were less likely to be provided than details, $F(1, 114) = 16.56, p < .0001$. However, low-uniqueness participants were as willing to recommend as they were to provide details, $F(1, 114) = .22$, NS. A significant main effect of type of WOM reveals that participants were more willing to provide details ($M_{discuss details} = 5.58$ vs. $M_{recommend buy} = 4.80$), $F(1, 114) = 6.54, p = .01$. Finally, a main effect of uniqueness indicates that high-uniqueness participants are less likely to engage in WOM ($M_{high-uniqueness} = 4.91$ vs. $M_{low-uniqueness} = 5.52$), $F(1, 114) = 4.21, p < .05$. These main effects are qualified by the interaction.

Controlling for mavenism in the analysis doesn’t change these results. A significant main effect

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5 Using a continuous measure of uniqueness revealed similar results. The uniqueness x type of WOM interaction was significant, $F(1, 114) = 8.20, p = .005$. Uniqueness decreased willingness to recommend (unstandardized $b = -.58$, $F(1, 52) = 9.69, p < .005$), but did not affect willingness to discuss details, $F(1, 62) = .32$, NS.
of mavenism shows that participants who score high on mavenism are more likely to generate WOM ($M_{high-mavenism} = 5.40$ vs. $M_{low-mavenism} = 5.05$), $F(1, 113) = 4.28$, $p < .05$.\textsuperscript{6}

< Insert Figure 5 about here >

Discussion

The results indicate that the effects of uniqueness on willingness to generate WOM differ significantly across the type of WOM considered: a recommendation to buy the product versus discussing product details. As high-uniqueness participants do not want the product to be widely adopted, they are less likely to recommend that others buy the product, compared to low-uniqueness participants. In contrast, uniqueness doesn’t inhibit willingness to engage in WOM that is relatively less likely to lead to increased product adoption (discussing product details).

Next, we explore the effect of uniqueness on actual WOM. Specifically, we study whether high-uniqueness individuals are less likely to provide positive WOM than low-uniqueness individuals.

\textit{STUDY 5: EFFECT OF UNIQUENESS ON LIKELIHOOD OF POSITIVE WOM}

Data Description

These data were provided to us by BzzAgent, a WOM agency that maintains a large pool of volunteers (agents) who participate in WOM campaigns. BzzAgents receive no compensation other than free samples of the product that they promote and price-off coupons (the free sample

\textsuperscript{6} A continuous measure of mavenism reveals similar results; mavenism increases willingness to generate WOM, unstandardized $b = .33$, $F(1, 113) = 7.81$, $p < .01$.}
ensures ownership for the purpose of our study). In our discussions, BzzAgent executives identified a particular candy bar as a discretionary product that was often consumed publicly. To confirm that the candy bar was a publicly consumed product, we paid 88 individuals a token amount to rate that product. Participants rated their likelihood of consuming it in places other than their home to be significantly higher than the mid-point of the scale (1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely, mid-point = 4 vs. M = 4.98), F (1, 87) = 29.27, p < .0001. Participants also rated the likelihood of their friends seeing them consume the product to be significantly higher than the mid-point of the scale (1 = not at all likely, 7 = very likely, mid-point = 4 vs. M = 4.59), F (1, 87) = 11.29, p < .005). Furthermore, participants rated the candy bar to be a discretionary purchase, agreeing with the statement that the candy bar would be nice to have, but that it was not essential (1 = disagree, 7 = agree, mid-point = 4 vs. M = 5.28), F (1, 87) = 62.57, p < .0001. These ratings confirmed the evaluation that the candy bar was perceived to be a publicly consumed discretionary product.

BzzAgents document WOM activity via an online report (where they describe what they said, and to whom) and a campaign-end survey. Agents can complete as many online reports as they like. We analyzed the WOM activity reports because these reports include the actual WOM content. We excluded six agents who each filed more than 17 reports (more than three standard deviations above the mean). Three independent raters who were blind to the hypotheses scored each WOM report in terms of its favorability (how positively the agent talked about the product with others; 1 = not at all positive, 7 = very positive; Cronbach α = .62). If the agent did not provide any details or evaluations about the product to others, raters left the field blank. Conservatively, we coded a report to include favorable WOM if it received a score of 4 or higher from at least one of the raters (when agents did provide product evaluations to others, they were
always favorable). Even so, in our data, only 13% of the agents provided favorable WOM to others more than once. Given so few multiple positive reports, for our analysis we looked at the likelihood that an agent would talk favorably about the product at least once (yes, no). We note that, because not all agents completed online reports, there may have been instances where agents talked favorably about the product but did not report it via the online report system.

BzzAgent allowed us to measure agents’ mavenism and uniqueness traits via scales anchored by 1 and 5. As the CNFU scale was deemed to be too long, the 8-item DUCP scale (which correlates highly with CNFU; see appendix B) was used to measure uniqueness ($\alpha = .90$). We conducted a median split on agents’ uniqueness to classify them as low- or high-uniqueness. We used this two-level variable as a between-subjects factor. We also measured mavenism ($\alpha = .92$). BzzAgents, who voluntarily sign up to engage in WOM, scored very high on mavenism (a median score of 4.83 on a scale of 1-5). Mavenism does not affect our dependent measure and controlling for it does not change results; it is therefore excluded from the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Our analysis includes 549 agents for whom we had uniqueness scores and demographics information. We analyzed the effect of (high, low) uniqueness on the likelihood of an agent engaging in favorable WOM (yes, no) in a logistic regression, controlling for their age.

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7 An example of a report judged to include favorable WOM from the agent: “My friend said she was exhausted and needed a pick me up so I opened my drawer and pulled out a [candy bar]. She asked what it was and I told her the most delicious thing you will ever taste. She took a bite and said, oh my God, you are right. What all is in this thing. I told her what was in it and she couldn't believe it tasted that good. She asked where she could get some and I told her they are all over.”

Conversely, an example of a report that was judged to not include WOM evaluations from the agent: “[A friend] came into my office to discuss [work]. He noticed that my candy dish was filled with [the candy bars] and asked about it. I told him that it is for a bzz campaign and that I would like his opinion of the candy bar. With his first bite, he told me that he believed that the crunchiness made it a real treat. He said that he is not a chocolate person but enjoyed the combination. He took another bar from the dish to eat later.” Note that, in the latter example, the agent did not provide any evaluations to their friend.
Consistent with hypothesis 3, high- (vs. low-) uniqueness agents were less likely to generate favorable WOM ($X_{\text{high uniqueness}} = 33\%$ vs. $X_{\text{low uniqueness}} = 41\%$; Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 4.87, p < .05$). Younger agents were also less likely to generate favorable WOM, Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 4.50, p < .05$.  

Interestingly, uniqueness did not affect agents’ likelihood of reporting a conversation per se (i.e., completing an online WOM activity report, $X_{\text{high uniqueness}} = 70\%$ vs. $X_{\text{low uniqueness}} = 73\%$; Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 4.41, \text{NS}$). However, we also find a significant effect of uniqueness on likelihood of generating favorable WOM if we restrict the analysis to those 395 agents who did complete the online report, with high-uniqueness agents being less likely to generate favorable WOM ($X_{\text{high uniqueness}} = 47\%$ vs. $X_{\text{low uniqueness}} = 57\%$; Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 4.41, p < .05$).

These analyses of actual WOM reports reveal that high- (vs. low-) uniqueness individuals are less likely to generate favorable WOM. However, uniqueness did not affect the likelihood of individuals reporting (generating) WOM per se. This is consistent with study 4 results, which showed that high- (vs. low-) uniqueness individuals were less willing to recommend that others buy a product, but were equally willing to provide product details.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

We respond to calls for research by Bagozzi (1975) and Godes et al. (2005, 419/423) “to investigate the fundamental motives behind the individual’s proclivity for communication” and to answer the question of “who should the firm target to facilitate the spread of information?” These results help firms to identify the appropriate individuals they should recruit as WOM agents. Second, we respond to a call for research by Brown and Reingen (1987) regarding the

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8 A continuous measure of uniqueness reveals directionally consistent results, but these fail to achieve significance (Wald $\chi^2 (1) = 1.43, p = .23$). This may be a consequence of having used a different scale to measure uniqueness (DUCP vs. CNFU; see discussion in appendix B) and/or the fact that the dependent measure was categorical.
types of products that people will talk about with others, by demonstrating the effect of uniqueness on WOM for public vs. private products. Third, we investigate the effect of uniqueness on the content of WOM in terms of positive WOM that includes positive recommendations versus WOM that only includes product details (Keiningham et al. 2008).

**Summary of Results**

Studies 1 and 2 revealed that among people who own a product, uniqueness decreases willingness to engage in positive WOM more for public (vs. private) products (hypothesis 1). Study 2 also demonstrated that the effect of uniqueness on willingness to provide positive WOM is attenuated when the product is not owned (hypothesis 2). Consistent with hypothesis 3, these effects are significant for WOM that contains positive product evaluations, but not for WOM that only contains product information.

We next explored the process underlying these effects. In study 3a, participants rated WOM containing positive evaluations to be more persuasive than WOM that only contains product details. They also rated positive WOM to be more persuasive for public (vs. private) products. In study 3b, high- (vs. low-) uniqueness consumers were less likely to purchase a public product after it was adopted by others. Taken together, studies 3a and 3b reveal that the expected cost of providing positive WOM is higher for high-uniqueness consumers when talking about public products.

Study 4 demonstrates the effect of high versus low uniqueness on willingness to provide positive WOM evaluations versus WOM about product details, supporting hypothesis 3 in a between-subjects setting. Study 5 analyzes content of reported WOM and finds additional evidence supporting hypothesis 3 in real-world data.
Implications

Over 50 years ago, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) found that WOM influenced brand switching purchases seven times more effectively than newspapers and magazines, four times more effectively than personal selling, and two times more effectively than radio advertising. This importance of WOM has persisted into the present. Reasons for the growing importance of WOM include the increasing complexity of products, the growth in the amount of available product information, and the decrease in perceived reliability of traditional media (Godes et al. 2005). Consequently, firms are relying more on WOM communication and are recruiting consumers to be volunteer WOM agents (Court, Gordon, and Perrey 2005; Kaikati and Kaikati 2004). These agents are often not paid by firms to engage in positive WOM; instead, they volunteer to engage in WOM for the psychosocial benefits associated with this activity. For instance, BzzAgent has over 250,000 agents who volunteer as unpaid WOM endorsers (e.g., Wells 2004).

Firms engaged in WOM marketing find it difficult to monitor the performance of WOM agents (number of people talked with, quality of the message, etc.). Consequently, it is important for firms to understand the factors that encourage and deter consumers’ WOM as these factors significantly affect marketing communications. For instance, studies 1 and 2 in the present research suggest that agents’ need for uniqueness may be an important factor to consider when launching publicly consumed discretionary products, as high uniqueness may attenuate the extent to which agents provide positive WOM for such products. Furthermore, studies 2, 4, and 5 highlight the effect of uniqueness on willingness to provide different types of WOM (specifically, providing positive recommendations versus product details).
Limitations and Directions for Further Research

We focus on consumers’ willingness to provide positive WOM, rather than on the effectiveness of such WOM. Specifically, it is possible that certain individual characteristics may make some consumers more effective promoters (i.e., they may convince people more easily, or may convince a greater number of people) than others. Additionally, these differences in effectiveness may vary with product characteristics. For instance, recent research by Goldenberg et al. (2006) suggests that social opinion leaders may be more persuasive for adoption of radical innovations, while product experts may be more persuasive for adoption of incremental innovations. Such individual differences in effectiveness, and consumers’ reaction to positive WOM from sources of varying characteristics, remain fruitful avenues for future research.

While our focus was on willingness to generate positive WOM (recommendation) versus neutral WOM (details), further research could also study the incidence of negative WOM (complaints and criticisms) being driven by individual characteristics. In the present research, we also asked study 2 participants to report willingness to generate negative WOM. Because responses on that item, after reverse scaling, were similar to those reported for willingness to generate positive WOM, we omitted them from the discussion. While negative WOM is most often driven by product or service failures (e.g., Walker 1995), high-uniqueness consumers could potentially be strategic and talk down a product after purchasing it so that others don’t buy the same product. This behavior could be investigated in greater detail in follow-up studies.

In study 2, uniqueness did not affect willingness to recommend products that were not owned. In that context, we had explicitly told participants that they did not intend to buy the product. It is likely that uniqueness may decrease willingness to recommend products that an individual doesn’t own, but intends to buy in the future. This aspect could also be studied further.
Finally, in the present set of experiments we focus on WOM to friends, classmates, and acquaintances. A rich literature that examines communication across different social ties (e.g., Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993) suggests that greater social capital is earned when information is provided across strong ties (i.e., close others). However, if individuals judge their uniqueness relative to close (versus distant) others, the social cost of positive WOM may be higher when talking to strong (versus weak) ties. It would be useful to study this tradeoff and the flow of WOM across different social ties as another direction to extend the present work.

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on a psychosocial cost associated with positive WOM: promoting a product through positive WOM recommendations decreases the uniqueness of possessions, which hurts high-uniqueness consumers. We highlight the boundaries (public vs. private products, ownership, and positive WOM evaluations vs. product details) and the process underlying the effect of uniqueness on willingness to engage in WOM. These results help us contribute to research on WOM by identifying consumers’ characteristics that promote or hinder WOM communication (Godes et al. 2005), how these factors vary across product categories (Brown and Reingen 1987), and how the willingness to generate WOM differs across different types of WOM content (Keiningham et al. 2008).
REFERENCES


FIGURE 1

High need for uniqueness decreases willingness to provide positive WOM for product primed for public use – study 1

Willingness to generate positive WOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public use</th>
<th>Private use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High uniqueness</td>
<td>5.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low uniqueness</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 2

High need for uniqueness decreases willingness to provide recommendations for owned public product – study 2

A. Willingness to recommend buying when participant owns the product

B. Willingness to recommend buying when participant doesn’t own the product

C. Willingness to discuss details when participant owns the product

D. Willingness to discuss details when participant doesn’t own the product
FIGURE 3

Buy recommendations are perceived to be more persuasive than product details for publicly consumed products – study 3a
FIGURE 4

Others’ adoption of public products decreases purchase likelihood of high-uniqueness consumers – study 3b
FIGURE 5

High need for uniqueness decreases willingness to provide WOM recommendations but doesn’t affect willingness to discuss product details – study 4
APPENDIX A: PRODUCT DESCRIPTIONS

A. Sandals (Manipulated as public/private) – Study 1

Score Sandals are a new, unisex sandal product on the market. They are waterproof and lightweight, weighing only a few ounces. Their ergonomic shape molds to your foot, and the massaging bumps on the inside make them extremely comfortable. They are also are odor-resistant and the soles are slip resistant and non-marking. These sandals are available in all half and whole sizes from 4 to 13, in footwear stores.

B. Apple iPhone (Public product) – Study 2

The new Apple® iPhone is a revolutionary handheld device that includes the functions of a mobile phone, a multimedia player, a 2-megapixel camera, and internet services such as e-mail, text messaging, and web browsing. It is 11.6 millimeters thick and has 4GB of storage space. The Apple iPhone has built-in wireless internet (WiFi) capability, as well as Bluetooth capability (which can be used with a wireless earpiece – sold separately). Further, the Apple® iPhone can play iTunes audio or video files, and has a battery life of 5 hours for talk time, video, or web browsing, and 16 hours in music mode. It comes with headphones that incorporate a microphone for hands-free use.

The Apple® iPhone features a unique 3.5-inch 480 x 320 touch-screen display, which allows you to control the device using only a touch screen (without an actual keypad). Phone calls can be made simply by touching a name or number in the address book, favorites list, or call log with your finger. It also features Visual Voicemail, an industry first, which allows you to go to any of your messages without listening to the prior messages. The Apple® iPhone is protected by multiple layers of intellectual property, and Apple® has filed several patents to protect its technology.

While early reviews for this new product have generally been positive, some critics have noted possible limitations of the Apple® iPhone. For example, the touch-screen display may be fragile and susceptible to scratching, and may be too small to accurately press with your fingers. Another concern voiced by critics is that although the iPhone is thin, it may be too large and heavy to carry around comfortably in your pocket. Also, 4 GB of storage space may not be enough for video and music files. A final concern is that a talk-time battery life of five hours may not be sufficient.

Overall, the Apple® iPhone seems to be an attractive product with many positive features and a few limitations.

C. Apple TV (Private product) – Study 2

The new Apple® TV is a revolutionary device that allows you to watch movies, TV shows, and photos downloaded from your computer on your TV. The Apple® TV itself is a small square device measuring 7.7 inches per side and just 1.1 inches high, far smaller than a standard DVD player. It connects to your TV easily, and connects to your computer either with an Ethernet cable or wirelessly if you have wireless capability. Further, Apple® TV features an Intel processor and a 40 GB hard drive for storing content locally, and delivers up to 720p high-definition resolution. It comes with an Apple® Remote, a power cord, and a quick start guide.

Best of all, any changes made to your iTunes library are automatically reflected on Apple® TV. Its built-in, super fast 802.11 wireless capability syncs your iTunes library from up to 5 Macs or PCs in the house. The 40 GB hard drive is capable of storing up to 50 hours of movies and TV shows, 9,000 songs, or 25,000 pictures, which are available for viewing on your television even if you turn off your computer. It also can stream video from a computer live to your TV without taking up space on Apple® TV’s hard drive. Apple® TV is protected by multiple layers of intellectual property, and Apple® has filed several patents to protect its technology.

While early reviews for this new product have generally been positive, some critics have noted possible limitations of the Apple® TV. For example, the remote has limited functionality, and does not control audio volume on Apple® TV. Another concern voiced by critics is that it does not support surround sound (stereo sound only). Also, 40 GB of storage space may not be enough for video and music files. A final concern is that you can’t “purchase from the couch,” meaning that you must go to your computer to download any new files into iTunes.

Overall, the Apple® TV seems to be an attractive product with many positive features and a few limitations.

D. NoteBook PC (Public product) - Study 3

The new NB PC is a revolutionary ultra-mobile personal computer that includes all the functionality of any typical PC or laptop device, launched in the US market this month for $549. It measures 8.9 x 6.5 x 1.4 inches, and it weighs 32 ounces (2 pounds), far lighter than any other products on the market. The NB PC contains a 9-inch wide screen with 1024 x 768-pixel resolution. A defining feature of the NB PC is its use of an 8 GB solid-state flash memory instead of a hard drive, and corresponding 10-second ultra-fast start-up time. With a dependable solid-state disk, the NB PC has unparalleled shock-protection and reliability.

E. NightBed Mattress (Private product) – Study 3

The new NB Mattress is a revolutionary ultra-light mattress that surpasses the performance of typical mattresses, launched in the US market this month for $549. A queen-size mattress weighs only 5 pounds, making it far lighter than other products on the market and very easy to transport following purchase or when moving to a new house or apartment. One defining feature of the NB Mattress is its use of an internal computer with flash memory instead of traditional coils. This allows it to adjust to the weight and pressure points of each person who lies on it. With a dependable computer, the NB mattress provides unparalleled comfort and reliability.
APPENDIX B: SCALE COMPARISONS

After completing the WOM measures, the 170 participants in study 2 completed three uniqueness scales: Consumer Need for Uniqueness (CNFU: Tian et al. 2001), General Need for Uniqueness (GNFU: Snyder and Fromkin 1977), and the Desire for Unique Consumer Products (DUCP: Lynn and Harris 1997). We also measured participants’ market mavenism (Feick and Price 1987). The full items are available on request from the authors. We averaged participants’ responses on all items in a scale (after appropriate reverse-scaling) to arrive at a score on each scale and calculated pair-wise correlations between scales (see table). We analyzed each scale using a confirmatory factor analysis approach with covariance structural equation models (SEM).

The results reveal that the General Need for Uniqueness measure (Snyder and Fromkin 1977) correlates somewhat more strongly with CNFU ($r = .26, p < .001$) than with DUCP ($r = .16, p < .05$). This suggests that CNFU may be a broader measure of consumers’ need for uniqueness, better predicting their behavior, while the DUCP may be restricted to the purchase of unique products. As Tian et al. (2001) state, the CNFU corresponds with consumers’ responses to product designs, fashion cycles, and variety-seeking behavior. The CNFU scale is also more reliable than the DUCP measure ($\alpha$’s of .95 and .85, respectively). We therefore use the CNFU scale to measure consumers’ need for uniqueness for the purpose of the present research. We also note that the overlap between CNFU and DUCP is significant, shown by a strong positive correlation ($r = .68, p < .001$). Study 2 uses the full CNFU scale, studies 3 - 4 use the CNFU-AS (avoidance of similarity) subscale as suggested by reviewers, and study 5 uses the DUCP scale (Bzz agent executives deemed the CNFU scale to be too long to administer). To ensure comparability across studies, we conduct a median split on the specific uniqueness scale used and classify participants as high- or low-uniqueness.
APPENDIX B (CONTINUED)

TABLE: SCALE CORRELATIONS AND RELIABILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale name</th>
<th>CNFU</th>
<th>CNFU subscales</th>
<th>MM</th>
<th>DUCP</th>
<th>GNFU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CNFU: Consumer’s need for uniqueness (31 items; Tian et al. 2001)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CCC AS UCC MM DUCP GNFU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCC: Creative choice counter-conformity subscale (11 items)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.85&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>AS: Avoidance of similarity subscale (9 items)</td>
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<td>.80</td>
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<td>.001</td>
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<td>UCC: Unpopular choice counter-conformity subscale (11 items)</td>
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<td>.77</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<td>MM: Market Mavenism (6 items; Feick &amp; Price 1987)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.45</td>
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<td>.19</td>
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<tr>
<td>DUCP: Desire for unique consumer products (8 items; Lynn and Harris 1997)</td>
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<td>.68</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>.42</td>
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<td>GNFU: General need for uniqueness (31 items; Snyder &amp; Fromkin 1997)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>.16</td>
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<tr>
<td>OL: Opinion leadership in consumer electronics (7 items; King &amp; Summers 1970)</td>
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<td>.26</td>
<td>.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliability (Cronbach α)</td>
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<td>.94</td>
<td>.94</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>SEM model fit statistics</th>
<th>CNFU</th>
<th>CCC</th>
<th>AS</th>
<th>UCC</th>
<th>MM</th>
<th>DUCP</th>
<th>GNFU</th>
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<tr>
<td>χ²</td>
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<td>24.5</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>46.2</td>
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<td>df</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>RMSEA (&lt;.05: good; ≤.08: acceptable)</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCLOSE (test; H₀: RMSEA ≤ .05)</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.64</td>
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<td>GFI</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.99</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFI</td>
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<td>.98</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.67</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> The upper number in each cell is the correlation between the row and column scales. The lower number is the statistical significance of the correlation (p-level). A (-) indicates that the correlation was not significant (p > .10).

<sup>b</sup> Because the survey was administered in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech tragedy, item #18 of the GNFU scale (If I must die, let it be an unusual death rather than an ordinary death in bed) was dropped lest it upset the participants.