Who Said Everyone Likes This Movie? How Source Impacts the Influence of Consensus Words

Abstract

When forming attitudes and decisions, we generally tend to rely on the opinions of stronger ties (such as close friends and family) relative to weaker ties (such as more distant friends and acquaintances). Nevertheless, in certain contexts, research has shown that we may rely more heavily on information and word-of-mouth from those who are more socially distant. The current study investigates the circumstances in which weak ties may have a stronger influence on perceptions and behaviors than strong ties. Specifically, the authors examine consensus language – words and expressions that suggest public agreement or consensus about a particular product, choice or experience. Three studies and one field experiment suggest that weak ties who use consensus words in product descriptions (e.g. “everyone likes this movie”) may be especially influential, because weak-tie statements are perceived to be generalizable to a broader population. This “strength of weak ties” effect is most prevalent in contexts where consumers are interested in understanding broader attitudes and behaviors, such as socially prominent products and decisions.