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Finding Versus Receiving: How Content Acquisition Affects Sharing

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Report Summary

People often share online content with others (e.g., articles and videos), and social sharing is an integral part of everyday life. As a result, companies and organizations now invest more and more resources in creating content that they hope people will share. But while some research shows how certain content characteristics impacts sharing (e.g., whether it evokes positive emotion, whether it is interesting), might the method by which people acquire content—that is, whether they find content themselves or receive it from others—impact subsequent sharing?

In this report, Zoey Chen and Jonah Berger examine how and why acquisition method influences social sharing.

In four studies, they demonstrate that *finding* (rather than *receiving*) content causes people to associate the content with themselves and process it less systematically. Thus, they become less sensitive to diagnostic content characteristics such as interestingness, writing quality, and argument strength.

Two additional studies examined the role of consumer-specific variables, demonstrating that content finders with high self-esteem were less likely to systematically process information than those with low self-esteem.

These findings suggest that managers should be sensitive to the communication channel of word of mouth when crafting content. To increase processing of content, marketers might use strategies that encourage consumers to feel like they have received the content (e.g., send content to via newsletters or direct email) rather than found the content (e.g., share content via blogpost or online ads). Furthermore, marketers need to devote more time and effort crafting content when the goal is to encourage sharing among receivers.

Further, content should be crafted with the consumer-specific variables in mind. When the target audience has characteristics that are consistent with high information processors (e.g., articles targeting depressed individuals or ads targeting teens with low self-esteem), higher quality content is more likely to encourage sharing among these individuals.

Taken together, the studies demonstrate how acquisition method impacts sharing and the underlying processes behind these effects. These findings deepen insights into psychological drivers of word of mouth and shed light on how contextual factors, content characteristics, and the self interact to drive transmission.

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Social sharing is a huge part of everyday life. People share news, opinions, and information with their friends, family members and other social ties (De Angelis et al. 2012; Dubois, Rucker and Tormala 2011; Dubois, Bonezzi and De Angelis 2015; Packard and Wooten 2013). Technology has only made such sharing faster and easier. Through email, Facebook, and other outlets, consumers share billions of pieces of online content (e.g., news articles, videos, and stories) each day (Protalinski 2011). Further, this sharing, or word of mouth, has a significant impact on consumer behavior. It shapes the products people buy (Mayzlin and Chevalier 2006), the movies they watch (Duan, Gu, and Whinson 2008; Liu 2006), and the restaurants they enjoy (Babin et al. 2005; Chen and Lurie 2013).

Driven by the importance of this phenomenon, recent work has focused on what drives people to talk and share in the first place (see Berger 2014 for review). Most of this research has focused on how different characteristics, or aspects of content, impact whether people share it. Products and information that evoke more interest (Berger and Schwartz 2011; Chen and Berger 2013; Heath et al. 2001; Moldovan, Goldenberg and Chattopadhyay 2011l), arouse more emotion (Berger and Milkman 2012; Rime 2009; particularly high arousal emotions, Berger 2011) or contain more useful information (Heath et al. 2001) get shared more.

But while it is clear that content with certain characteristics is more likely to be passed on, might the mere method through which people acquire that content also impact sharing? Sometimes people *find* content themselves, coming across it while browsing a website. Other times people *receive* content from others, through email forwards and retweets. While the content of a given article or video is the same whether people find it themselves or receive it from others, might acquisition method impact subsequent transmission, and if so, how?

This article examines how and why acquisition method influences sharing. Six studies demonstrate that how people acquire content affects their willingness to share it with others. When people find (vs. receive) content, they associate the content with the self and process it less systematically. As a result, diagnostic characteristics such as content interestingness, writing quality, and argument strength have less of an impact on sharing. People are more willing to share an interesting article than a boring one when they received those articles, for example, but this difference was attenuated (and in some cases, disappeared) when they felt like they found those articles themselves.

This work makes several important contributions. First, we demonstrate that the context in which people come across content affects subsequent sharing. While the content itself doesn't change, the mere fact that people found versus received it shapes their willingness to pass it on.

Second, we deepen the understanding around when content versus context drives sharing. Not surprisingly, a great deal of research demonstrates that the quality or characteristics of content affect whether people share it. We extend this area by illustrating *when* content characteristics play a larger role. We demonstrate that when people find content themselves, certain content characteristics have less of an impact on sharing.

Third, we contribute to the literature on the extended self. While a great deal of research shows that people associate purchases, possessions, and other physical items with the self, we suggest that such associations can be even broader. Even when things are explicitly owned by someone else (e.g., articles are owned by their authors), feeling that one has found or discovered something seems to create a personal connection and encourage association with the self.

Importantly, the current paper offers practical advice for firms interested in word of mouth marketing.

Given that people process found versus received content to different depths, our work suggest that managers should be sensitive to the channel of word of mouth communication when crafting content. Specifically, managers should devote more time and effort when crafting content when the goal is to encourage sharing among receivers. For example, if the goal is to propogate sharing of content/ad/video, etc. via email, where one person receives content and decides whether or not to forward the email to others, then higher qualitied content - more interesting, better written, stronger arguments – will be needed (vs. propogating sharing of found content). Flipping the relationship around, if the goal is to increase processing of content, then one possibility would be to make consumers feel like they've received the content (e.g., send content to consumers via newsletters, direct emails, etc.) rather than found the content (e.g., share content via blogpost, online ads, etc.).

Also, the current work suggest that consumer-specific variables, such as self-esteem, can predict sharing in certain context. In our case, we show that finders with high self-esteem are less likely to systematically process information than those with low self-esteem. This suggest that content should be crafted with the target audience's trait characterisitcs in mind, where higher qualitied content are needed when the target audience have characteristics that are consistent with low self-esteem (e.g., article targeting depressed individuals; ad targeting bullied teens).

Taken together, this research provides insight into the psychological drivers of word of mouth and the interaction between technology and the self. Further, it showcases the complex relationship between contextual factors, content characteristics, and the self, in driving sharing.

ACQUISITION METHOD AND SHARING

While prior work has shown that content characteristics such as interest, emotions etc. drive sharing (see Berger 2014 for a review), there has been less attention to how contextual factors – variables that are unrelated to the underlying content themselves – affect sharing. To address this gap, we explore how content acquisition method affects sharing. We start by reviewing relevant literature on self-association and information processing and then introduce our theoretical framework and key hypotheses.

Acquisition Method and Association of Content with the Self

People often associate external things with the self (Beggan 1992; Belk 1988). Consumers see possessions like cars or clothes as extensions of who they are. The car someone drives is not just a car, it is *their* car, and is viewed as part of the self (just like one's own body). One's possessions signal one's identity (Berger and Heath 2007; Escalas and Bettman 2005) and an emotional connection can be formed such that the loss or damage of possessions is akin to losing a "loved one who had been a part of one's life" (Belk 1988, p. 142).

While associations often occurs with material things (e.g., a car), it can also occur with non-material entities, like thoughts and ideas (Baer and Brown 2012; Belk 1988; Dittmar 1992). People show unconscious ownership over the letters in their names, for example, despite the fact that they did not acquire these letters and that others' names also use the same letters (Nuttin 1985, 1987). Extending these ideas to the online domain, Belk (2013) proposed that people associate themselves with digital things they create (e.g., avatars) or own (e.g., music or ebooks).

We theorize that associations with the self can be even broader. Even when someone did not create online content, or even pay for it, and even when it is explicitly owned by others (e.g., articles are owned by the writer or website), we suggest that how one acquires content may influence association. Kids, for example, claim nursery rhyms as 'theirs' if they thought they were the first ones to hear it (Isaac 1933; Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks 2002). Similarly, contributors to the popular content-sharing website Reddit.com feel that the person who first posts content (e.g., a news article) has claim over the content as her "own." In fact, this sentiment is so strong such that contributors are explicitly discouraged from posting content that has already been posted by someone else (http://www.reddit.com/wiki/reddiquette).

Building on these ideas, we suggest that compared to when they receive content from others, people who feel like they found content on their own should associate that content more with themselves. A pilot study confirms this idea. Participants (N = 61) envisioned either receiving an article from someone else or finding an article on their own and indicated the extent to which they associated the article with the self in two different ways. First, we asked, "To what extent do you associate the content with yourself?" (*1 = Not at all* to *7 = Very much so*). Second, we used an association measure adopted from Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). Participants were presented with 7 pairs of circles – where one circle represents the self and the other represents the article – that overlapped to different degrees ranging from no overlap (coded as 1 = no association) to complete overlap (coded as 7 = complete association). Participants chose the pair of circles that reflected their felt association to the article. On both measures, people felt a greater sense of association when they felt like they've found the content than when they received it ($M_{\text{finding}} = 3.19$ vs. $M_{\text{receiving}} = 2.14$, $t(59) = 2.78$, $p < .01$ and $M_{\text{finding}} = 2.91$ vs. $M_{\text{receiving}} = 2.17$, $t(59) = 2.21$, $p = .03$, respectively).

Self Association and Processing

We suggest that associating content with the self should decrease information processing.

According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM, Petty and Cacioppo 1986), depth-of-processing (i.e., elaboration) falls on a continuum, with peripheral/heuristic processing on one end, and central/systematic processing on the other (Chaiken 1980; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983).

In general, people tend to have healthy (i.e., high) self-esteem. They attribute success (e.g., doing well on a test) to themselves (e.g. being smart) and failures (e.g., doing badly) to outside forces (e.g., the test was tricky, Campbell and Sedikides 1999; Heider 1958). Similarly, on most desirable dimensions such as intelligence, people tend to see themselves as above average, or better than most of their peers (Alicke et al. 1995; Dunning, Meyerowitz, and Holzberg 1989; Kruglanski 1996).

Various research streams support the notion that high self-esteem reduces information processing. Compared to those with low self-esteem, people who have high self-esteem tend to feel more certain about the self and are less likely to process self-related information (Baumgardner 1990; Campbell and Lavallee 1993; Marsh and Weary 1989; Weary, Elbin, and Hill 1987). Certainty, in turn, reduces information processing (Tiedens and Linton 2001; Weary and Jacobson 1997). People often engage in in-depth information processing to reduce feelings of uncertainty, and so when people feel certain (e.g., when they have high self-esteem), their need for processing decrease (Tiedens and Linton 2001; Weary and Edwards 1994; Weary and Jacobson 1997; Yost and Weary 1996). Attitudes research makes similar predictions. Self-esteem is associated with self-trust (Govier 1993) and trust reduces information processing

(Priester & Petty 1995, 2003). When ads contain trustworthy sources, for example, people tend to process them less. Thus both research on certainty and trust suggest that self-esteem may be associated with less in-depth (or systematic) processing of things associated with the self.

Further, when people process less, they become less sensitive to diagnostic information (i.e., information typically considered useful in a judgment context, Hilton and Fein 1989). As processing decreases, for example, attitude change becomes less affected by the merits of the underlying persuasive arguments (Chaiken 1980; Petty and Cacioppo 1986). While in-depth processors were more persuaded by a razor ad using strong arguments (e.g., Chemically formulated coating eliminated nicks) than weak ones (e.g., Designed with the bathroom in mind), sensitivity to argument strength (a diagnostic characteristic for attitude change) was attenuated among those who processed more shallowly (Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983). In other words, while one might imagine that people should be more persuaded by strong (or high quality) arguments than weak (or low quality) ones, this tendency decreases as in-depth thinking decreases (Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann 1983; Petty, Wegener, and Fabrigar 1997).

THE CURRENT RESEARCH

Taken together, we suggest that one way acquisition method can shape transmission is through changing information processing. While the Elaboration Likelihood Model is often applied to attitude change, we argue that similar principles shape sharing. Because people associate found content more with the self, and tend to feel a heightened sense of certainty and trust towards self associated things, this should reduce processing of found (versus received) content, which should impact willingness to share.

In particular, similar to how argument strength (a diagnostic characteristic for attitude change in the ELM framework) matters less under low processing, content characteristics that are diagnostic of content's share-worthiness – such as interestingness and writing quality – may matter less when people find the content. Not surprisingly, people often use how interesting content is to determine whether to share. More interesting news articles are more likely to be shared (Berger and Milkman 2012) and more interesting products or conversation topics are more likely to be discussed (Chen and Berger 2013; Moldovan et al. 2011). Similarly, given that what people share is a signal of identity (Berger 2014), people should be more willing to share well-written content as opposed to articles with typos.

If our theory that finding reduces processing is correct, then the impact of diagnostic content characteristics like interestingness and writing quality on sharing should be attenuated when people find content themselves. When people receive content, they should be more likely to share more interesting (vs. less interesting) or well-written content (vs. poorly-written content). When people find content, however, the content should have less of an impact on sharing (i.e., the content characteristic's effect on sharing should be attenuated) because people are less able to distinguish between more and less interesting (or well- versus poorly- written) content. Note, it is not that finders think content characterisitcs are less diagnostic for sharing (e.g., weaker link between perceived interestingness and willingness to share), rather, lack of processing leads them not to notice variation in content characteristics (e.g., interestingness) to begin with. Taken together, our theorizing leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Diagnostic content characteristics should have less of an impact on sharing when people feel like they found the content themselves, as opposed to received it from others.

H2: This occurs because finding meakes people less sensitive to diagnostic content characteristics.

It is worth noting that our theorizing differs from research on self-relevance. Personally relevant information, or information that is more important to the self, tends to be processed in greater detail (Cacioppo and Petty 1986). Self-relevance, however, is different from mere self-association. While certain content may be more self-relevant because of the topic's personal importance (e.g., tuition increases at one's own school), *any* content can become self-associated by finding it rather than receiving it. An article about tuition increases at one's own school, for example, is more personally relevant than one about tuition increases at a distant school, but finding (rather than receiving) either article should lead that article to become more associated with the self. Thus the two constructs are distinct. When looking through an online newspaper, people find some articles that are self-relevant, but they also find many that are less self-relevant (e.g., water on Mars), and so articles can become associated with the self even if they are not self-relevant.

Six studies test our theoretical framework. Studies 1 and 2 provide preliminary tests of our theorizing, demonstrating that while receivers are more willing to share interesting rather than less interesting content, this difference is attenuated among finders. Study 3 finds similar results for writing quality. To further connect these findings to the elaboration likelihood model, Study 4 uses a traditional argument quality manipulation and measures thought listings. Finally, the last two studies provide additional backing for our theoretical framework. If our theory is correct that finders are less sensitive to diagnostic content characteristics because people tend to be less critical of things associated with the self (i.e., found content), then our effects should be

attenuated among finders who are prone to be self-critical, such as those with low self-esteem. Supporting this idea, Study 5 shows our effect is attenuated among finders with chronically low self-esteem and Study 6 shows the same result when self-esteem is manipulated.

One methodological detail is worth noting. If finders searched for content on their own, while receivers were assigned to receive a particular article, this would create a potential confound. Even if we tried to pick content that would greatly interest receivers, given the breadth of content available, finders would be more likely to come across something that better fit their idiosyncratic preferences. Consequently, it would be unclear whether any sharing differences were driven by acquisition method or the different content themselves. To avoid this concern, our studies randomly assign participants to either find or receive the *same* piece of content. This allows us to control for the content itself and isolate the impact of acquisition method.

STUDY 1: ACQUISITION METHOD AND INTERESTINGNESS

Our first study provides a preliminary examination of whether content acquisition method influences sharing. People should be more willing to sharing interesting rather than boring content. But compared to people who receive content, would this tendency be reduced among people who feel like they found the content themselves?

Participants were randomly assigned to either find or receive an article that had been pretested to be either more or less interesting. Then, we measured willingness to share and perceptions of the content itself (i.e., how interesting it is).

We predict that content's influence on willingness to share should be moderated by acquisition method. If feeling like one has found content reduces processing, as we suggest, then

finders' willingness to share should be less sensitive to, and thus less impacted by, diagnostic content characteristics. In other words, people should be more willing to share more interesting content (over less interesting content), but this difference should be attenuated among finders.

We also test the proposed mechanism behind this effect. Compared to receivers, finders should see less of a difference between the more and less interesting content, and this, in turn, should drive differences in willingness to share.

Method

One hundred and ninety-two people from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in the study for pay. They were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (Acquisition method: finding vs. receiving) × 2 (Content: more vs. less interesting) between-subjects design.

First, we manipulated how people acquired the content. Everyone was asked to envision browsing the Internet. Participants in the receiving condition were told, "Someone emailed you the following article." In contrast, participants in the finding condition came upon the target article themselves after navigating through other content. They were taken to a mock news website where they had to click the "Next" button (located on the bottom right corner of the page) to flip through articles. Participants clicked "Next," were shown a filler article (labeled "Article A"), and then clicked next again to be taken to the next article. Eventually, after clicking through a few filler articles ("Article B," "C," etc.), they were shown the target article. To ensure that the content of these filler articles did not affect sharing of the target article (e.g., contrast effects), article content was blank. This manipulation thus allowed participants to experience finding content on one's own while controlling for the potential effects of encountering other

articles. A pretest (N = 76) confirms that compared to participants in the receiving condition, finders felt a greater sense of having "found" the content themselves (To what extent do you feel like you had found the article? *1 = Not at all* to *7 = Very much*; $M_{finding} = 3.56$ vs. $M_{receiving} = 2.55$, $t(74) = 2.34$, $p = .02$).

Second, we manipulated whether the viewed article was more or less interesting. In the more (less) interesting condition the article discussed a spray-on battery (women losing weight). A pretest confirmed that the more interesting article was perceived as more interesting.[1]

After reading the article, participants completed our key dependent variable, willingness to share (How likely would you be to share this article? *1 = Not very* to *7 = Extremely*).

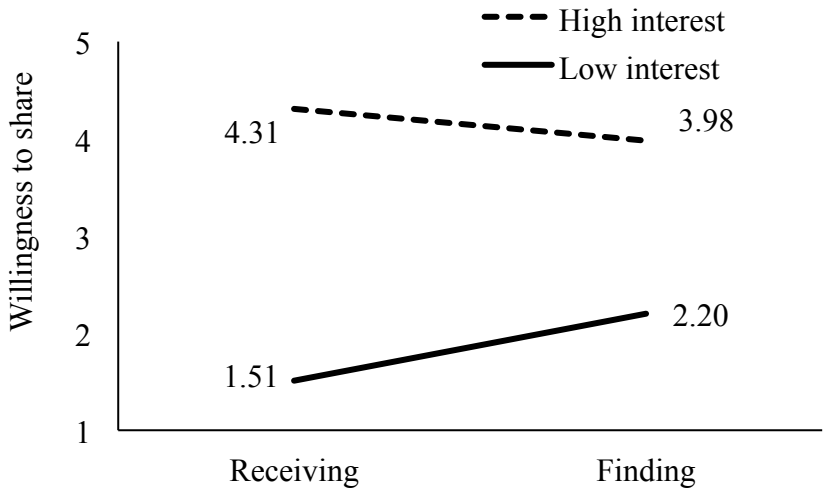
Finally, to test the underlying process (i.e., sensitivity to diagnostic content characteristics), participants rated how interesting they thought the article was (*1 = Not at all* to *7 = Extremely*).

Results

Sharing. In addition to a main effect of Content ($F(1, 188) = 86.74$, $p < .001$), a 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed the predicted Acquisition Method × Content interaction ($F(1, 188) = 4.37$, $p = .04$; see Figure 1). While both finders and receivers were more willing to share the more interesting article than the less interesting one, the significant interaction indicates that compared to people who received the content (5.41 vs. 1.51, $F(1, 188) = 71.76$, $p < .001$), this tendency was attenuated among people who found the content themselves (3.98 vs. 2.20, $F(1, 188) = 23.85$, $p < .001$).

[1] Participants (N = 109) rated how interesting (*1 = Not at all* to *7 = Extremely*) various article were. We picked two articles, one that was perceived as more interesting than the other ($M = 5.47$ vs. $M = 3.94$, $F(1, 107) = 43.03$, $p < .001$).

FIGURE 1: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS SHARING

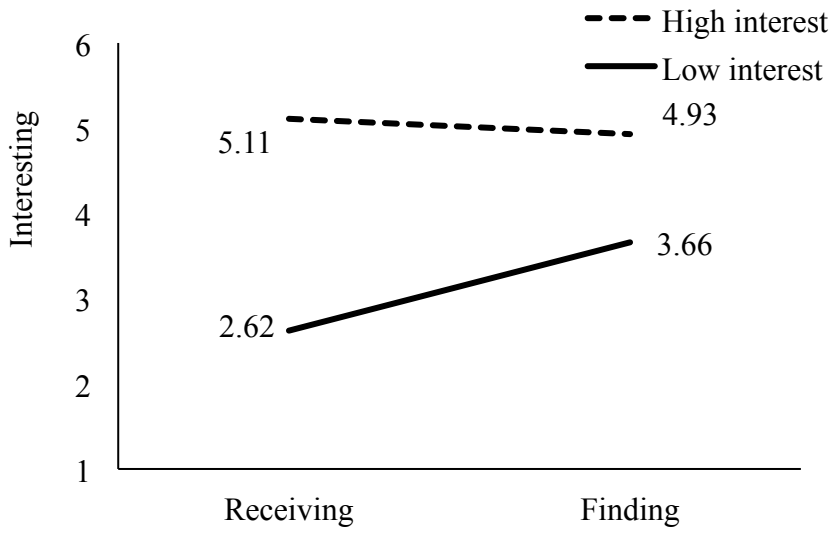


Perceived Content Interestingness. Content perceptions revealed a similar pattern. In addition to a main effect of content ($F(1, 188) = 67.33, p < .001$), a 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed the predicted interaction ($F(1, 188) = 7.09, p < .01$; see Figure 2). While everyone perceived the more interesting article as more interesting, the interaction indicates that compared to people who received the content (5.11 vs. 2.62, $F(1, 188) = 65.18, p < .001$), this difference content perception was attenuated among people who found the content themselves (4.93 vs. 3.66, $F(1, 188) = 14.04, p < .001$).

Mediation. As predicted, moderated mediation analysis (with IV = Article Interest, Moderator = Acquisition method, Mediator = Interesting, and DV= Share, Hayes 2013, Model 7: 5000 Bootstrapped samples) demonstrates that acquisition method's impact on sharing was driven by sensitivity to the content. Acquisition method moderates sensitivity to underlying content interest ($\beta = -1.22$, SE = .46, t = -2.66, $p < .01$) and interestingness is positively related to

sharing (β = .66, SE = .06, t = 11.20, p < .01). Further, compared to receivers (Conditional indirect effect = 1.66, Boot SE = .25; 95% CIs: 1.22 to 2.20), finders discriminated less between the two articles, and thus the content had less of an impact on driving sharing (Conditional indirect effect = .85, Boot SE = .23; 95% CIs: .42 to 1.34). Index of of moderated mediation further confirms successful moderated mediation (95% CI: -1.46 to -.23).

FIGURE 2: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS CONTENT PERCEPTIONS



Discussion

Study 1 provides preliminary support for our theorizing. First, as hypothesized, acquisition method influenced willingness to share. Compared to receivers, the content itself had less of an impact on sharing among people who felt like they found the content themselves.

Second, as predicted, this was driven by how much people attended to the content itself. Not surprisingly, people thought the high interest article was more interesting than the low interest one. More importantly, however, finders perceived a *smaller* difference between the two

articles (compared to receivers), and this drove the effect of acquisition method on sharing. Said differently, Study 1 demonstrates that finding content makes people less sensitive to diagnostic content characteristics (in this case, how interesting it is), reducing the impact of that content characteristic on sharing.

Ancillary data casts doubt on alternative explanations based on effort. Exerting effort to acquire or create something can increase evaluations (Bem 1972; Norton, Mochon and Ariely 2012), and so if our finding manipulation increased perceived effort, one could argue that this drove willingness to share. But this was not the case. There was no difference between conditions in how much effort participants reported spending to acquire the article (*1 = Very little effort* to *7 = A lot of effort*, $M_{\text{finding}} = 1.87$ vs. $M_{\text{receiving}} = 1.64$, $F(1, 188) = 2.39$, $p > .10$). This casts doubt on the possibility that the results are driven by finders spending more effort.

One might wonder if, in addition to changing processing, finding should have a main effect on sharing. If people like themselves, and associate the content with themselves, maybe this affective transfer would increase sharing. But while ownership can increase overall liking (Beggan 1992; Heider 1958) or valuation (Kahneman, Knetsch and Thaler 1991), these effects are usually present when people have exclusive physical ownership (Thaler 1980) or when the owned object is especially telling about one's identity (e.g., arguments that represent one's morals, De Dreu and van Knippenberg 2005). Finding, while inducing some association with the self, is unlikely to generate such strong associations. As a result, finding may not be enough to increase overall liking and thus sharing.

STUDY 2: ALTERNATIVE ACQUISITION METHOD MANIPULATION

Study 2 tests our perspective using an alternate acquisition method manipulation. While Study 1 tried to mimic how people find content in real life, one might argue that our results are due to the particular operationalization used. Further, even though there were no differences in perceived effort between conditions, one might still contend that effort is a viable alternative explanation. Study 2 addresses both points by operationalizing finding in a different way.

Method

One hundred and seventy-seven undergraduate students participated in the study for pay. They were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (Acquisition method: finding vs. receiving) × 2 (Content: more vs. less interesting) between-subjects design.

First, we manipulated acquisition method. To keep the conditions as similar as possible, those in the receiving condition imagined that someone emailed them an article whereas those in the finding condition imagined discovering an article on a news website. A pretest (N = 123) confirmed that those in the finding condition felt a greater sense of having found the content than those in the receiving condition (To what extent do you feel like you had found the article? *1 = Not at all* to *7 = Very much*; $M_{\text{finding}} = 4.47$ vs. $M_{\text{receiving}} = 2.03$, $t(121) = 8.69$, $p < .001$).

Second, we manipulated content using the same high or low interest article from Study 1.

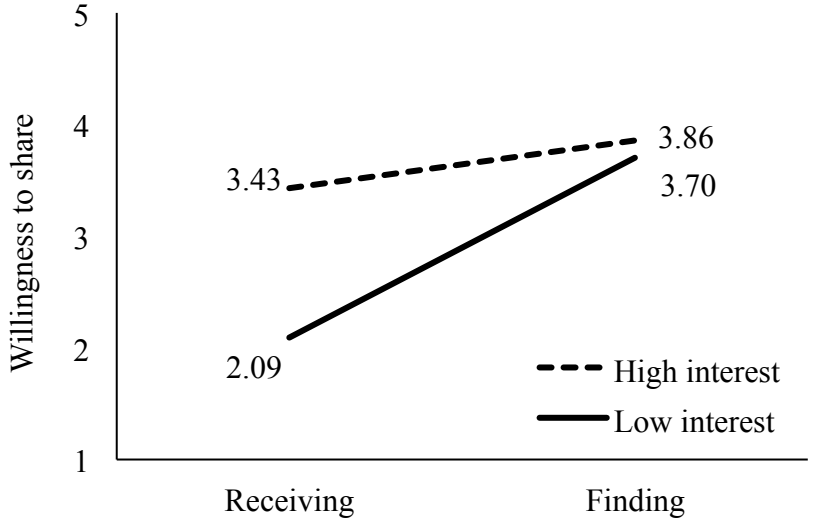
Third, participants indicated their willingness to share the article (*1 = Not very* to *7 = Extremely*).

Finally, participants indicated how interesting they perceived the article to be using the measure from Study 1.

Results

Sharing. Main effects of content ($F(1, 173) = 6.98, p < .01$) and acquisition method ($F(1, 173) = 13.11, p < .01$) were qualified by the predicted interaction ($F(1, 173) = 4.34, p = .04$, Figure 3). While receivers were much more likely to share the high than low interest content (3.43 vs. 2.09, $F(1, 173) = 10.96, p < .01$), this difference was attenuated in finders (3.86 vs 3.70, $F < 0.2, p > .6$).

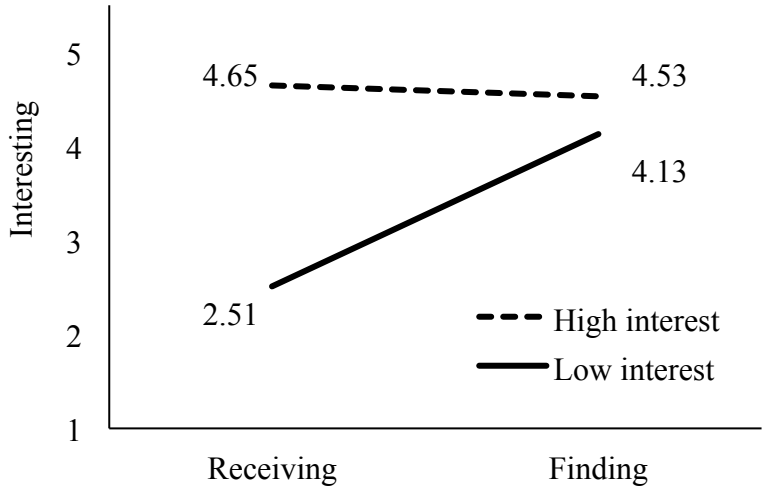
FIGURE 3: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS SHARING



Perceived Content Interestingness. Content perceptions revealed a similar pattern. Main effects of content ($F(1, 175) = 19.78, p < .01$) and acquisition method ($F(1, 175) = 6.88, p = .01$) were qualified by the predicted interaction ($F(1, 175) = 9.15, p < .01$, see Figure 4). While

receivers perceived the high interest content as significantly more interesting than the low interest content (4.65 vs. 2.51, $F(1, 173) = 27.39$, $p < .01$), finders were less sensitive to this difference (4.53 vs. 4.13, $F < 1.1$, $p > .3$).

FIGURE 4: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS CONTENT PERCEPTIONS



Mediation. Moderated mediation analysis (with IV = Article Interest, Moderator = Acquisition method, Mediator = Interesting, and DV= Share; Hayes 2013, Model 7: 5000 Bootstrapped samples) confirms our predictions. Acquisition method moderates people's sensitivity to underlying content interestingness ($\beta = -1.73$, SE = .57, $t = 3.02$, $p < .01$) and perception of interestingness is positively related to sharing ($\beta = .75$, SE = .05, $t = 15.14$, $p < .01$). Further, while content drove sharing among receivers (Conditional indirect effect = 1.61, Boot SE = .30; 95% CIs: 1.00 to 2.24), this was not the case among finders (Conditional indirect effect = .31, Boot SE = .32, 95% CIs: -.31 to .97). Index of moderated mediation again confirms that acquisition method moderates the mediating effect of content interest (95% CIs: -2.17 to -.41).

Discussion

Study 2 further supports our theorizing. Consistent with Study 1, acquisition method influenced willingness to share. Diagnostic content characteristics (in this case, interest) had less of an impact on sharing when people found (vs. received) content.

Further, this effect was driven by decreased sensitivity to the content itself. Compared to receivers, finders saw less of a difference between the low and high interest articles.

The fact that we found similar results using a different acquisition method manipulation speaks to the robustness of the effects. Further, this manipulation casts further doubt on alternative explanations based on effort, as both conditions involved similar actions on the part of the participants.

STUDY 3: ACQUISITION METHOD AND WRITING QUALITY

To test the generalizability of our effect, Study 3 uses a different diagnostic content characteristic: writing quality. Not surprisingly, articles that have more typos or grammatical issues are seen as lower quality (Robb, Ross and Shortreed 1986). Further, by just manipulating the number of typos, we can hold the article topic constant, ruling out the possibility that different topics are driving any observed results.

Though in extreme cases people might share very poorly-written content to point out how bad it is, in general, typos and grammatical issues should decrease people's willingness to share. Indeed, when pilot study participants (N = 21) were asked whether they would be more likely to share an article with typos or one without, they overwhelmingly chose the article without typos

(90%, $\chi^2(1) = 13.76$, $p < .001$). When asked why, most indicated self-presentational concerns (e.g., "It would make me seem smarter" or "seems more professional").[2]

If finding reduces sensitivity to content characteristics, then finders should be less likely to notice typos, and as a result, whether or not the article is well-written should have less of an impact on willingness to share.

Method

One hundred and thirty undergraduate students participated in the 2 (Acquisition Method: finding vs. receiving) × 2 (Content: Control vs. Typos) between-subjects study for partial course credit.

First, we manipulated acquisition method using the method from Study 1.

Second, we manipulated the content itself. We selected an article from an online publisher and showed participants one of two versions, either with typos and grammatical issues (Typos condition) or without (Control condition, see Appendix for stimuli).

Third, participants indicated willingness to share the article using the scale from Study 1.

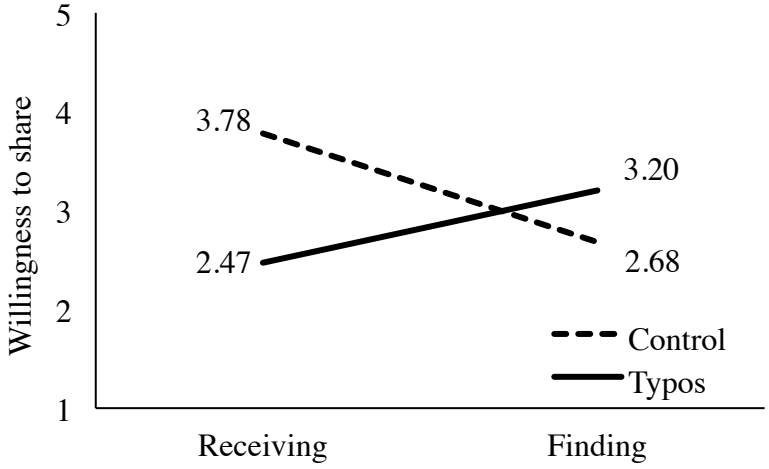
Finally, as our measure of process they rated how well-written they perceived the article to be (*1 = Not at all well-written* to *7 = Extremely well-written*).

[2] The two who said they'd prefer to share the article with typos cited reasons of "funny to share" and "so I could correct them."

Results

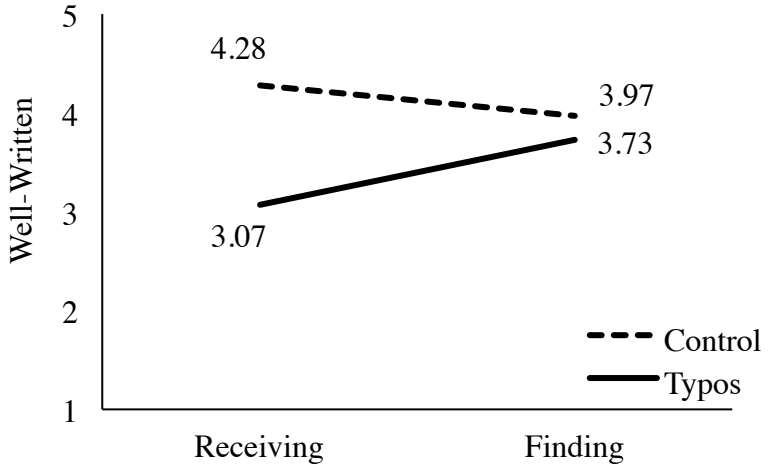
Sharing. A 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed only the predicted Acquisition Method × Content interaction ($F(1, 126) = 8.23, p < .01$, see Figure 5). Among receivers, adding typos decreased willingness to share (2.47 vs. 3.78, $F(1, 126) = 8.52, p < .01$). This difference, however, disappeared among people who found the content themselves (3.20 vs. 2.68, $F < 1.4, p > .25$).

FIGURE 5: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS SHARING



Perceived Writing Quality. Content perceptions revealed similar effects. As predicted, there was an marginal Acquisition Method × Content interaction ($F(1, 126) = 3.24, p = .07$, See Figure 6). Among people who received the article from others, adding typos made the article seem less well-written (3.07 vs. 4.28, $F(1, 126) = 10.15, p < .01$). This difference disappeared, however, among people who found the content themselves (3.73 vs. 3.97, $F < 0.4, p > .5$). Said another way, while receivers noticed the version with typos was more poorly written, finders did not.

FIGURE 6: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS CONTENT PERCEPTIONS



Mediation. As predicted, moderated mediation (with IV = Content characteristic, Moderator = Acquisition method, Mediator = Well-written, and DV= Share; Hayes 2013, Model 7: 5000 Bootstrapped samples) demonstrates that acquisition method moderates people's sensitivity to how well-written the content is (β = .97, SE = .54, t = 1.80, p = .07) and that well-writtenness is positively related to sharing (β = .54, SE = .10, t = 5.75, p < .01). Compared to receivers (Conditional indirect effect = .66, Boot SE = .23; 95% CIs: .27 to 1.19), finders discriminated less between the control and the article with typos and thus sharing depended less on the content itself (Conditional indirect effect =.13, Boot SE = .25; 95% CIs: -.33 to .64). Index of moderated mediation provides marginal support that acquisition method affects sharing by affecting sensitivity to diagnostic characteristics of content (95% CIs: -.01 to 1.26; 90% CIs: .07 to 1.18).

Discussion

Using a different content characteristic, Study 3 underscores the findings of the first two studies. First, acquisition method influenced willingness to share. A diagnostic content characteristic, in this case, how well–written the content was, had less of an impact on sharing when people found (vs. received) the content.

Further, this effect was driven by decreased sensitivity to the content itself. Compared to receivers, finders were less discerning of whether the article was well-written.

By holding the article itself constant and manipulating only the presence of typos, Study 3 casts doubt on alternative explanations driven by differences in content topic.

STUDY 4: ACQUISITION METHOD AND ARGUMENT STRENGTH

While the first three studies are consistent with our theorizing, one could argue that stronger processing evidence would come from testing our model with more traditional ELM variables. To do this, Study 4 uses one of the most common ways of testing processing: argument quality.

We take an article opposing a vegetarian-only lunch policy and, in addition to manipulating acquisition method, manipulate whether it contains strong or weak arguments against that policy. Then we examine willingness to share. The article should be more compelling when it uses strong arguments, and thus receivers should be more willing to share when the article contains strong (vs. weak) arguments. If our theorizing is correct, however, this effect should be attenuated among finders.

To further test our proposed mechanism, we use a well-validated depth-of-processing measure: thought-listing (Petty and Cacioppo 1986). If the effect of content acquisition method is driven by differences in depth-of-processing (i.e., finders process less than receivers), as we have suggested, then content acquisition method should impact the number of thoughts listed. Receivers should generate more unfavorable thoughts toward a policy after receiving an article with strong (vs. weak) arguments against it, but this difference in unfavorable thoughts should be attenuated among finders. Further, the number of thoughts listed should mediate the effect of acquisition method on sharing.

Method

One hundred and eighty-seven undergraduate students were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (Acquisition Method: finding vs. receiving) × 2 (Content: strong argument vs. weak argument) between-subjects design. They participated for partial course credit.

First, we manipulated acquisition method using procedures from Study 1.

Next, participants were shown an article in which we manipulated argument quality. The article either contained strong or weak arguments against implement vegetarian-only lunches in primary school (adapted from Akhtar, Paunesku and Tormala 2013).

After participants read the article, they indicated their willingness to share it. To show that our results were not driven by our single item sharing DV, we use a 3-item measure adapted from Zhang, Feick and Mittal (2015): To what extent do you think that you will tell or not tell others about the article (*1 = Certain not to tell* to *7 = Certain to tell*, *1 = Very unlikely to tell* to 7 = *Very likely to tell*, and *1 = Probably will not tell* to *7 = Probably will tell*, $\alpha = .97$).

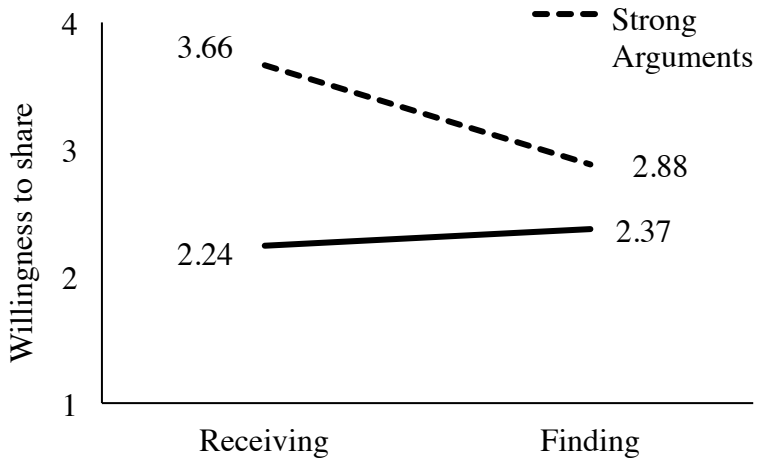
Following prior research (Cacioppo and Petty 1981; Petty and Cacioppo 1979), participants were then asked to list all the thoughts they had when reading the article. After listing their thoughts they rated whether each thought was unfavorable, favorable, neutral, or unrelated to the vegetarian-only policy.

If finders are less likely to process the content in depth, as we have theorized, then this should show up in thought listings. Receivers should list more unfavorable thoughts towards the policy when the article contains strong, rather than weak, arguments against it. This difference should be attenuated, however, among finders.

Results

Sharing. A main effect of argument strength ($F(1, 183) = 12.89, p < .01$), was qualified by the predicted marginal interaction between acquisition method and article argument strength ($F(1, 183) = 2.89, p = .09$, see Figure 7). As expected, while receivers were more likely to share the article if it contained strong rather than weak arguments (3.66 vs. 2.24, $F(1, 183) = 13.74, p < .01$), this effect was attenuated among finders (2.88 vs. 2.37, $F(1, 183) = 1.81, p > .10$).

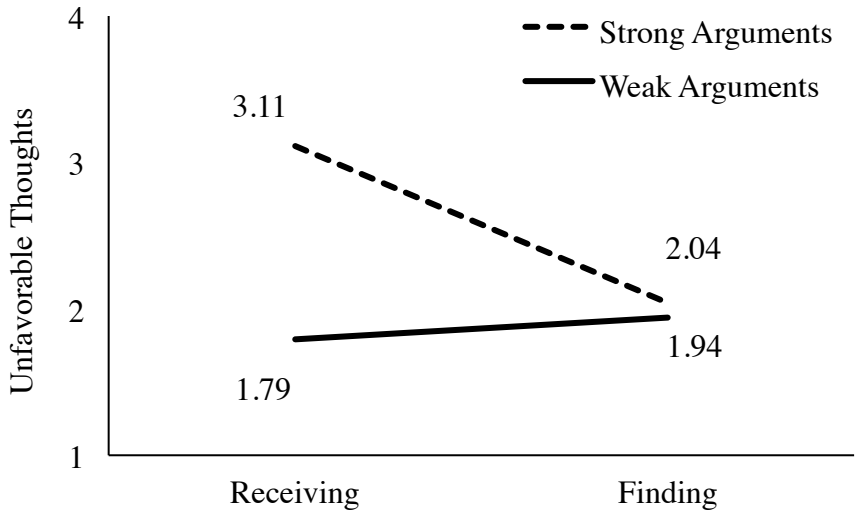
FIGURE 7: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS SHARING



Unfavorable thoughts listed. Since the article contained strong and weak argument *against* the vegetarian-only policy, we examined the number of unfavorable thoughts people generated to measure sensitivity to message quality.

A main effect of argument strength ($F(1, 183) = 5.13, p = .03$) was qualified by the predicted marginal interaction between acquisition method and argument strength ($F(1, 183) = 3.72, p = .06$, see Figure 8). While receivers generated significantly more unfavorable thoughts toward the policy after reading the article containing strong (vs. weak) arguments against the policy (3.11 vs. 1.79, $F(1, 183) = 8.64, p < .01$), finders were less discriminating (2.04 vs. 1.94, $F(1, 183) = .06, p > .80$).

FIGURE 8: HOW ACQUISITION METHOD AFFECTS NUMBER OF UNFAVORABLE THOUGHTS GENERATED



Mediation. As predicted, moderated mediation (with IV = Content characteristic, Moderator = Acquisition method, Mediator = number of unfavorable thoughts, and DV= Share;

Hayes 2013, Model 7: 5000 Bootstrapped samples) demonstrates that acquisition method moderates the number of unfavorable thoughts people generated towards the vegetarian-only policy (β = -1.22, SE = .63, t = -1.93, p = .06) and that unfavorable thoughts generated is positively related to sharing (β = .13, SE = .06, t = 2.17, p = .03). Further, compared to receivers (Conditional indirect effect = .18, Boot SE = .10; 95% CIs: .02 to .47), finders were less sensitive to the quality of the articles (as reflected by smaller difference in number of unfavorable thoughts generated) and were thus less affected by article argument strength when making sharing decisions (Conditional indirect effect = .01, Boot SE = .06; 95% CIs: -.09 to .18). Index of moderated mediation confirms that acquisition method affects sharing by influencing people's sensitivity to content characteristics (95% CIs: -.53 to -.01).

Discussion

Using traditional ELM measures, results of Study 4 underscores our suggestion that acquisition method affects sharing by influencing content processing.

While people who received content were more likely to share it if the content contained strong (vs. weak) arguments, this effect was attenuated among finders. The fact that the results of the first three studies extend to argument quality speaks to the robustness of the findings.

Further, by using thought listing procedures, the gold standard for depth-of processing (Petty and Cacioppo 1979, 1986; Priester and Petty 1995), the results provide direct support for our hypothesized process. While receivers generate more unfavorable thoughts from reading articles containing strong (vs. weak) arguments again a policy, this difference was attenuated among finders. This reduction in processing, in turn, drove sharing.

STUDY 5: ROLE OF THE SELF

If finding de-sensitizes people to diagnostic content characteristics because people less deeply process self-associated things, as we suggest, then this effect should be attenuated among those who are prone to more deeply process self-related things. Studies 5 and 6 test this possibility.

As discussed earlier, people with low self-esteem (i.e., self-critical individuals) tend to be less certain about themselves (Campbell et al. 1996) and feel like their self-value is "on the line" (Kernis et al. 1993, p. 1203). As a consequence, they tend to process things associated with the self more deeply (Weary et al. 1987). More formally:

H3: As finder's self-esteem decreases, (a) diagnostic content characteristics should have a greater impact on sharing (b) due to increased sensitivity to content.

Study 5 tests our theorizing using individual differences in self-esteem. We focus on finders (given that is where we expect self-esteem to apply) and examine whether diagnostic content characteristics have a greater impact on sharing among those with low self-esteem because they are more sensitive to these characteristics.

Method

Sixty people from Amazon Mechanical Turk participated in the 2 (Content: more vs. less interesting) × self-esteem (measured) mixed design study for pay.

First, we manipulated the content. People were shown either the high or low interest article from Study 1.

Second, all participants followed the finding procedures from Study 1 and rated the target article on likelihood of sharing.

Third, they rated perceived interestingness.

Finally, we assessed self-esteem using measures adapted from Bosson, Swann Jr., and Pennebaker (2000). People with higher self-esteem tend to show implicit egotism and like their initials more than other letters of the alphabet (Greenwald and Banaji 1995). Consistent with this idea, participants were asked how much they liked each letter of the alphabet (*1 = Not at all* to *5 = Very much so*), and after rating all 26 letters, they were prompted for their initials. Consistent with prior work, self-esteem was calculated as average liking of the letters in one's own initials minus average liking of all other letters.

Results

Sharing. We regressed willingness to share on content interest, self-esteem (mean centered, standardized), and their interaction. People were more willing to share more interesting content ($\beta_{\text{content}} = 2.29$, SE = .50, $t = 4.62$, $p < .001$), but more importantly, as predicted, this difference decreased as people's self-esteem increased ($\beta_{\text{content} \times \text{self-esteem}} = -.98$, SE = .50, $t = -1.96$, $p = .05$).

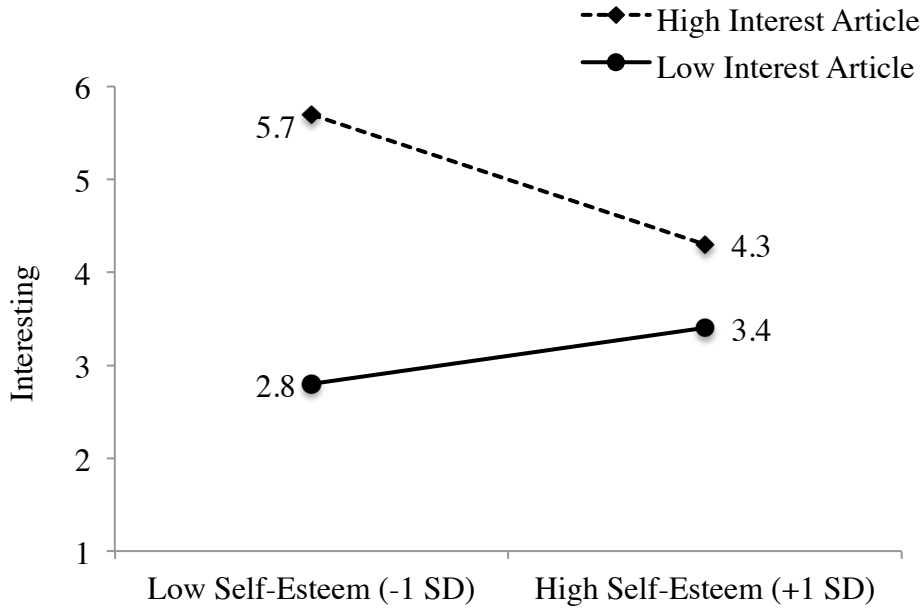
Spolight analysis provides insight into the pattern of results (see Figure 9). People who have low self-esteem (-1 SD) were more willing to share the more interesting article than the less

interesting one ($\beta = 3.27$, $t = 4.64$, $p < .001$). This difference was attenuated, however, and became marginal ($\beta = 1.31$, $t = 1.85$, $p = .07$) among those with high self-esteem (+1 SD).

FIGURE 9: HOW FINDERS' SELF-ESTEEM MODERATE SHARING

Perceived Content Interestingness. Perceived interest shows similar results (Figure 10). While people generally perceived the high interest content as more interesting than the low interest content ($\beta_{\text{content}} = 1.86$, SE = .50, $t = 3.72$, $p < .001$), this difference decreased as self-esteem increased ($\beta_{\text{content} \times \text{self-esteem}} = -1.04$, SE = .50, $t = 2.07$, $p = .04$). Spotlight analysis illustrates that those with low self-esteem (-1 SD) perceived the high interest article as more interesting than the low interest article ($\beta = 3.27$, $t = 4.64$, $p < .001$). Among those with high self-esteem (+1 SD), however, this difference was attenuated and participants no longer differentiated between high and low interest content ($\beta = .83$, $t < 1.2$, $p > .20$).

FIGURE 10: HOW FINDERS' SELF-ESTEEM MODERATES CONTENT PERCEPTIONS



Mediation. As predicted, moderated mediation (with IV = Article Interest, Moderator = Self-esteem, Mediator = Interesting, and DV= Share; Hayes 2013, Model 7: 5000 Bootstrapped samples) demonstrates that, consistent with our theorizing, self-esteem moderates the impact of finding on sharing by changing sensitivity to the content itself. Self-esteem moderated finder's sensitivity to content interestingness (β = -1.04, SE = .50, t = 2.07, p = .04) and that interestingness drives sharing (β = .84, SE = .07, t = 12.56, p < .01). Namely, those with low self-esteem (-1 SD) were more willing to share the more interesting content, and this was driven by their sensitivity to underlying differences in content (Conditional indirect effect = 2.45, Boot SE = .52, 95% CIs: 1.32 to 3.39). As self-esteem increases, however, sharing was driven less by the content itself. Among those with high self-esteem (+1 SD), content was less linked to sharing because individuals were less sensitive to differences in underlying content (Conditional indirect effect = .70, Boot SE = .63, 95% CIs: -.55 to 1.90). Index of moderated mediation confirms that

self-esteem affects sharing via influencing people's sensitivity to content characteristics (95% CIs: .11 to 1.72).

Discussion

Study 5 further demonstrates the underlying role of self-association and processing in these effects. Consistent with our suggestion that finding reduced sensitivity to diagnostic content characteristics because people are less likely to deeply process things associated with the self (since people on average have high self-esteem that yields a feeling of certainty and trust), this effect was attenuated among those with low-esteem. When finding content, individuals with low self-esteem were more sensitive to differences in content interestingness, and these differences drove content's impact on sharing.

STUDY 6: MANIPULATING THE ROLE OF THE SELF

Study 6 further tests our theoretical framework by manipulating rather than measuring self-esteem. While Study 5 is supportive, one could argue that rather than being driven by processing, they were driven by some other factor that covaries with self-esteem. Alternatively, one could argue that the results are driven by low self-esteem individuals being more prone to critically process *all* content, and not just content associated with the self.

To rule out these possibilities, and further test our conceptualization, Study 5 manipulates self-esteem (via false feedback) and examines how it impacts sharing by both finders and receivers. Decreasing self-esteem should increase processing of things associated with the self. As a result, we predict that it should moderate the impact of acquisition method on sharing. In

other words, decreasing self-esteem should lead finders to look more like receivers, make them attend more to how interesting the content is, and as a result, content should have a bigger impact on sharing.

Method

One hundred and fifty-two undergraduate students participated in the study for partial course credit. They were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (Self-esteem: low vs. high) × 2 (Acquisition method: finding vs. receiving) × 2 (Content: more vs. less interesting) between-subjects design.

First, to manipulate self-esteem, we used a classic feedback design. Participants were asked to solve 33 analogies ("Land is to dirt as ocean is to____: *a. river, b. water, c. air, d. sea"*) and received positive or negative feedback based on their performance (adapted from Baumeister and Tice 1985; Forgas 1991). A pretest (N = 41) revealed that participants solved 17.4 analogies on average. Consequently, in the main study, all participants were first provided with their score on the analogy test and those who answered 17 or fewer analogies correctly were told that they performed below average (low self-esteem manipulation) whereas those who answered more than 17 questions correctly were told that they performed above average (high self-esteem manipulation). People who were told that they had performed badly should have lowered self-esteem and thus process things associated with the self more thoroughly.

Second, we manipulated acquisition method. Participants either found or received a low or high interest article following the same procedures used in Study 1.

Thirds, participants indicated willingness to share and how interesting they found the article.

Results

Sharing. In addition to a main effect of content (M_{high} = 3.93 vs. M_{low} = 2.42, $F(1, 144)$ = 16.83, $p < .001$), a 2 × 2 × 2 ANOVA revealed only the predicted 3-way interaction ($F(1, 144)$ = 7.07, $p < .01$).

Examining the high and low self-esteem conditions separately sheds light on the pattern of results. People tend to have high self-esteem (Kruglanski 1996), and so, as expected, for participants given feedback that they did well, the results were consistent with the earlier studies. A significant acquisition method × content interaction ($F(1, 144) = 6.68$, $p = .01$) indicates that while content interest affected willingness to share among receivers (M_{high} = 4.70 vs. M_{low} = 1.91, $F(1, 144) = 22.14$, $p < .001$), it was attenuated among finders (M_{high} = 3.00 vs. M_{low} = 2.75, $F < 1$).

Among those given negative feedback (low self-esteem), however, there was only a main effect of content interestingness (M_{high} = 3.96 vs. M_{low} = 2.63, $F(1, 144) = 7.26$, $p = .001$). Acquisition method no longer moderated the effect ($F < 1.2$, $p > .3$). Reducing people's self-esteem led finders to be as sensitive to content characteristics as receivers when sharing.

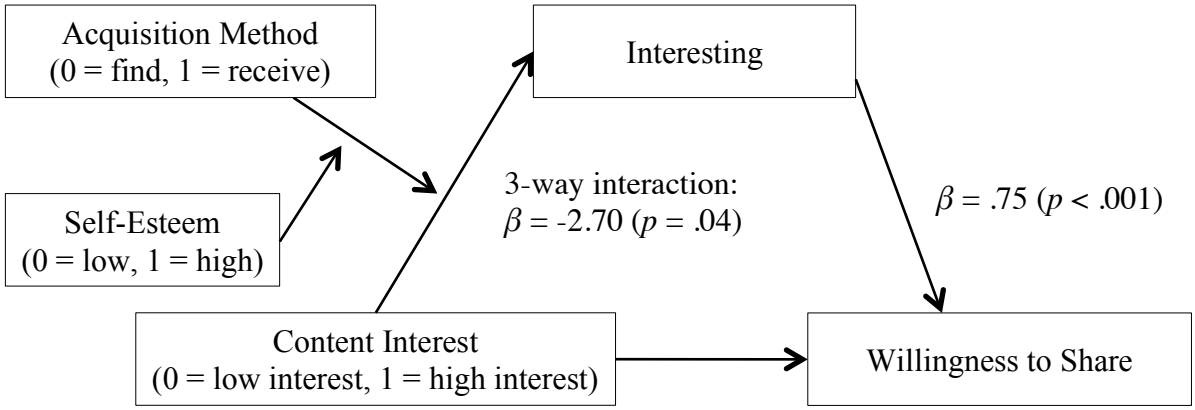
Perceived Content Interestingness. Perceived content interestingness showed similar effects. A main effect of content (M_{high} = 4.65 vs. M_{low} = 3.19, $F(1, 144) = 16.83$, $p < .001$) was qualified by the predicted 3-way interaction ($F(1, 144) = 3.13$, $p = .04$). All other main and interactive effects are insignificant *(F*s < 1.6, *p*s > .10). Examining the high and low self-esteem conditions separately provides insights into the pattern of results.

Among those primed with high self-esteem, results replicate the earlier studies. A marginal interaction between acquisition method and content ($F(1, 144) = 2.91, p = .09$) shows that while receivers saw the high interest article as more interesting ($M_{high} = 5.40$ vs. $M_{low} = 2.77$, $F(1, 144) = 18.99, p < .001$), this tendency was attenuated among people who found the content themselves ($M_{high} = 4.25$ vs. $M_{low} = 3.25$, $F(1, 144) = 1.58, p > .2$).

Among those primed with low self-esteem, however, there was only a main effect of content ($M_{high} = 4.43$ vs. $M_{low} = 3.43$, $F(1, 144) = 5.27, p = .02$). Acquisition method no longer moderated this effect ($F < 1.5, p > .2$). In other words, reducing self-esteem made finders as sensitive to underlying content characteristics as receivers.

Mediation. Moderated mediation analysis confirms the hypothesized process. A moderated mediation (IV = Article Interest, Moderator 1 = Acquisition method, Moderator 2 = Self-esteem, Mediator = Interest, DV = Share; Hayes 2013, Model 11: 5000 Bootstrapped samples) finds a 3-way interaction between content interest, self-esteem, and acquisition method on perception of interestingness ($\beta = -2.70$, SE = 1.32, $t = -2.03, p = .04$) and that interestingness is positively related to sharing ($\beta = .75$, SE = .05, $t = 14.16, p < .001$, Figure 11).

FIGURE 11: HOW SELF-ESTEEM AND ACQUISITION METHOD MODERATES THE MEDIATING ROLE OF INTERESTINGNESS



To better understand this interactive effect of self-esteem, acquisition method, and content characteristics on people's sensitivity to the underlying characteristic of interest, we look at high versus low self-esteem conditions separately.

Among people made to feel high self-esteem (i.e., told they had done well), results replicate Studies 1 and 2. Compared to receivers (Conditional indirect effect = 1.97, Boot SE = .44, 95% CIs: 1.13 to 2.85), finders did not distinguish as much between the high versus low interest articles, and as a result, sharing depended less on the underlying content (Conditional indirect effect = .32, Boot SE = .46, 95% CIs: -.50 to 1.92).

Among people made to feel low in self-esteem, however, the difference between finding and receiving disappeared. Finding content no longer de-sensitized people to underlying content interest (as marked by a lack of interaction between acquisition method and content characteristic, β = -1.07, SE = .90, t = -1.18, p = .24) and both finders' and receivers' sharing decisions were driven by content (Conditional indirect effect = .75, Bootstrapped SE = .32, 95% CIs: .15 to 1.43).

Discussion

By manipulating self-esteem, Study 6 underscores its causal impact in driving finders' insensitivity to diagnostic content characteristics. As in the previous studies, finders were less sensitive to underlying differences in diagnostic content characteristics, and this lead to a weaker link between content and sharing. But consistent with our suggestion that these effects are driven by finders processing content less deeply because people are not inclined to critically process things associated with the self, reducing people's self-esteem attenuated the difference between finders and receivers. Decreasing people's self-esteem lead finders to attend more to the difference between high and low interest content, and this, in turn, drove willingness to share.

The fact that decreasing self-esteem made finders (but not receivers) more sensitive is especially supportive of our theory that it is through the association of content with the self (which self-esteem affects) that makes finders less sensitive to content characteristics.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Researchers have become more and more interested in the psychological drivers of social transmission, or why people share some things rather than others. But while work has begun to shed light on content characteristics (e.g., interestingness) that impact sharing, less is known about how contextual factors influence transmission. In particular, sometimes people find content themselves and sometimes people receive content from others. Does acquisition method impact sharing, and if so, how?

We theorized that acquisition method influences sharing by changing how deeply people process content. In contrast to receiving content, the act of finding causes people to associate the content with the self. And since people tend to have high self-esteem, and thus feel an elevated sense of certainty and trust for self associated things, they are less likely to deeply process found content. As a result, finders are less sensitive to diagnostic content characteristics (e.g., how interesting or well-written it is), and thus content has less of an impact on sharing.

Six studies support this conceptualization. The first four studies demonstrated that compared to receiving content, feeling like one has found content causes people to become less sensitive to diagnostic content characteristics (i.e., interestingness, writing quality, argument strength), which causes sharing to be driven less by the content itself. While receivers were more willing to share interesting over less interesting content (Studies 1 and 2), well-written over poorly-written content (Study 3), and articles backed by strong than weak arguments (Study 4), these differences were attenuated among finders. Further, these effects were mediated by perceived differences in the content itself (Study 1-4).

Studies 5 and 6 provide further evidence for the role of the self in these effects. Consistent with the notion that content plays less of a role among finders because people on average have high self-esteem and are thus less prone to deeply process things associated with the self, differences in self-esteem moderated our effects. Finders with trait low self-esteem behaved more like receivers (Study 5) and directly manipulating self-esteem had similar effects (Study 6). Taken together, the studies demonstrate how acquisition method impacts sharing and the underlying processes behind these effects.

Contributions

The current work makes a number of contributions. First, it extends prior research on drivers of word of mouth. While prior work has shown that content characteristics such as positivity, arousal, and controversy can affect sharing (Berger and Milkman 2012; Chen and Berger 2013), this work reveals conditions under which content is more or less likely to drive transmission. In this case, the content itself remained the same, but acquisition method influenced sensitivity to content characteristics, which, in turn, affected sharing.

Second, this work identifies a novel and unexplored contextual factor that affects social sharing. While some recent work has examined how communication channel (i.e., sharing online versus offline, Berger and Iyengar 2013) and audience size (Barasch and Berger 2014) impact sharing, these contextual factors occur at the point of sharing. The potential sharer has already processed the content and is deciding whether to share (or which content to share) given the particular audience and communication channel at the present moment. In contrast, acquisition method happens further upstream. It influences how content is processed, and as a result, affects sharing by impacting how potential sharers perceives the content itself.

Third, this research sheds light on how personality factors influence transmission. Prior research has shown that individual's need for uniqueness (Cheema and Kaikati 2010) and self-construal (interdependent vs. independent, Zhang, Feick, and Mittal 2014) affect whether people share things. We illustrate that self-esteem can also influence transmission. When individuals with healthy self-esteem find content, they are less likely to thoroughly process it. Regardless of content acquisition method, however, individuals with lower self-esteem likely devote more effort into processing and evaluating content. Thus not only can individual differences explain

some sharing behavior, we show that these differences interact with contextual and content-specific factors to affect social sharing.

Fourth, this work contributes to research on information processing. While prior research has identified contextual variables that influence depth-of-processing, such as background color (Soldat, Sinclair, and Melvin 1997) and the speed at which information is communicated (Smith and Shaffer 1991), our results suggest that *how* people come across information may also affect how people evaluate the information.

Our work also contributes to research on the Elaboration Likelihood Model. While self-relevance, or the extent to which information has personal relevance or importance, can increase depth-of-processing (Petty and Cacioppo 1986), we show that merely *associating* content with the self (through finding) can reduce processing. Thus there is an important conceptual difference between self-relevance (e.g., this policy will impact my life) and mere self-association (e.g., I found this article, so it is connected to me). To our knowledge, this is the first paper to find that relating something to the self can actually decrease processing, and subsequent work might examine the relation between these constructs more deeply.

Finally, this research not only illustrates that people psychologically associate content with the self, it highlights the *ease* through which these associations occur. Merely feeling like one has found content, or come upon it by oneself, is enough to make people associate the content with the self. While prior work has shown that people make associations between themselves and the things they own (e.g., Belk 1988), the current work demonstrates that such associations can occur even more broadly. Even when someone else created/owned the content (e.g., created by a journalist, and owned by her or the outlet she works for), feeling like one has discovered that content may be enough to engender a sense of connection.

Implications

The current paper offers practical advice for firms interested in word of mouth marketing. While firms might currently devote little thought to acquisition method, this work suggests that different amounts of attention should be devoted to crafting content with the aim of going viral in different channels. For example, if the goal is to foster sharing via long chains (i.e, one person sharing with another sharing with another), then higher quality content is needed because people are sensitive to the diagnostic characteristics when re-sharing received content.

Understanding the relationship between personality traits (e.g., self-esteem) and social sharing can help marketers develop better seeding strategies for viral campaigns. While firms might not have direct access to measures of self-esteem or other personality traits, readily available consumer information such as educational status, income, etc. can be used to proxy self-esteem (Rosenberg and Pearlin 1978) and other trait variables.

In summary, this paper illustrates that how one acquires content affects sharing. Compared to when they receive content from others, finding content makes people less sensitive to diagnostic content characteristics, and as a result, content has less of an impact on sharing. This work not only documents a previously unexplored facet of word of mouth, it highlights how various factors interact to impact transmission. Content characteristics interact with contextual factors and personality variables to affect what gets shared.

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APPENDIX: CONTROL VS. TYPOS (STUDY 3)

Control/(Typos) Version

The Internet Has Changed What We Find Attractive

So suggests a provocative new study showing a link between internet(/internets) access and the potential mates we find most attractive.

“We take the internet for granted(/granite), yet in much of the world there is a 'digital divide' that separates people living with and without luxuries(/luxurys)," study co-author Prof. David Perrett, a psychologist from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, said in a written statement. "So it should not be surprising that people in very different circumstances have different priorities for qualities in a spouse."

But what exactly are/is these differences?

To find out, a psychology Ph.D. student at the lab went to El Salvador, where 74 percent of the population lacks internet access. She showed 200 men and women (between the ages of 18 and 25) pairs of faces and asked the subjects to choose which face they found more attractive in each pair. The subjects also completed/completes a questionnaire to indicate whether they had access to the internet, a television, and running water.

The researchers found that people with internet access were more likely to prefer male faces were "stereotypically masculine" and female faces that were thinner and less masculine. People without internet access tended to prefer male faces with more feminine(/feminine) features and female faces that were heavier and more masculine.

“One possibility for the difference is the level of media exposure: people with internet access is more exposed to the media (adverts or websites), which promotes the beauty ideals of muscular men and thin feminine women," the researchers said(/saids) in a written statement.