Making Word-of-Mouth Impactful: Why Consumers React More to WOM about Experiential than Material Purchases

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Abstract

This paper documents evidence from five studies showing that WOM about experiential versus material purchases is superior in evoking reactions from WOM receivers that are valuable for firms (e.g., purchase intention). We find that this difference emerges from receivers' perception that WOM about an experience (vs. material object) is more substantive (i.e., involving, meaningful). Further, we test two potential antecedents of substantive WOM: receivers' and senders' identification with the purchase. Mediation- and moderation-based evidence indicates that receiver-, but not sender-, identification drives substantiveness. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: experiential purchase; material purchase; word-of-mouth; substantiveness; consumer reaction

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1. Introduction

Consumers are inundated with word-of-mouth (WOM), online and offline. There are currently more than four billion consumers with access to the Internet (International Telecommunication Union, 2019) where blogs, review sites, and social media platforms expose them to hundreds of millions of reviews, comments, and Tweets (Balabanis & Chatzopoulou, 2019). This has led some to brand social media as "WOM on steroids" (Lane, 2017). Offline, consumers converse with others on a daily basis about everything from vacations to electronics and from clothing to artistic performances (Anderson, 1998; Berger, 2014). Correspondingly, companies have allocated increasingly greater proportions of their marketing budgets to WOM initiatives (Moorman, 2014) and researchers have increased their efforts to help marketers navigate the WOM terrain and harness its potential (Okazaki, 2008).

Research in this domain has explored a key question: What differentiates impactful from non-impactful WOM? That is, what determines whether receivers of WOM subsequently react in ways that are valuable for the firm (herein referred to as 'value-creating reactions')? It is notable that past research in this area has primarily focused on a specific form of value-creating reaction to WOM—that is, sales (see Babić Rosario, Sotgiu, Valck, & Bijmolt [2016]; Floyd, Freling, Alhoqail, Cho, & Freling [2014]; You, Vadakkepatt, & Joshi [2015] for reviews). Certainly, much has been investigated in this area and sales resulting from WOM are of primary interest to firms. The present work adds to this body of knowledge by examining a novel framework of consumers' purchase intention following WOM. However, managers and scholars are often interested in a variety of other potential WOM outcomes that are beneficial in their own right, or

as a means to sales. Taking a more inclusive approach, the present investigation goes beyond sales to examine a diverse set of other reactions to WOM that are valuable to the firm and relevant to theory, such as consumers' inclination to search for additional information about the recommended purchase, to write an online review about the purchase, and to pass on WOM about the purchase to other consumers.

There are various determinants of WOM impact (Leonard-Barton, 1985; Moore & Lafreniere, 2020), with prior research giving particular attention to two: WOM's valence (Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad 2007; Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2014) and volume (Anderson & Salisbury, 2003; Liu 2006). In addition, the impact of WOM varies by, for example, the social ties between conversation partners (Brown & Reingen, 1987), the communication channel (Martin & Lueg, 2013), and WOM's ability to arouse (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

Extending this research, the present work theorizes and finds empirical evidence for WOM topic (whether the WOM is about an experiential or a material purchase) as a predictor of WOM's impact. Specifically, drawing on the literature on experiential versus material purchases (e.g., Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), we predict and show that WOM about experiential purchases is more impactful than WOM about material purchases. Following their original conceptualizations, we define experiential purchases as those the consumer makes with the intention of living through an event, while material purchases are those the consumer makes with the intention of owning a tangible good (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

A noteworthy aspect of this experiential versus material purchase categorization is that it is based on each consumer's subjective perception of the purchase. Hence, this categorization accommodates the idea that the same purchase can be perceived differently by different people or under different circumstances. For example, to a car collector, a new automobile acquisition

may be seen as an additional material piece that complements his existing set (i.e., a material purchase), whereas to an off-road enthusiast, such an acquisition may be seen as a way to enrich her weekend experiences (i.e., an experiential purchase). This malleability and subjectivity, used widely in the consumer behavior literature, has been the crux of the experiential versus material purchase categorization—one conceptualized as a continuum, rather than a dichotomy (e.g., Bastos, 2019ab, 2020ab; Bastos & Brucks, 2017; Caprariello & Reis, 2013; Carter & Gilovich, 2010, 2012; Chaplin, Lowrey, Ruvio, Shrum, & Vohs, 2020; Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009; Rosenzweig & Gilovich, 2012; Van Boven, Campbell, & Gilovich, 2010).

This specific way of conceptualizing experiential versus material purchases resulted from the need to solve a critical challenge. That is, while certain purchases clearly fall nearer the experiential-end (e.g., a theme park visit) and others fall nearer the material-end (e.g., a fire extinguisher) of the material-experiential continuum, most fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum—in a gray area. Interestingly, this challenge is not unique to the current categorization. In the domain of goods versus services (Nelson, 1970), Murray and Schlacter (1990, p. 52) write that "it is arguable that several operationalizations are such that the declared 'service' retains a 'goods' component, and vice versa". Therefore, notwithstanding the many strengths and contributions of previous categorizations using a dichotomous approach and based on more objective criteria of purchases such as tangibility, perishability, and online versus offline existence (e.g., the goods, services, digital products categorization; Babić Rosario et al., 2016), the experiential versus material categorization offers a solution to a longstanding challenge. This differential is important because, whereas investigations into categorizations different from ours have found mixed results in terms of WOM's impact—ranging from WOM having a greater impact in the sales of durable versus non-durable goods (You et al., 2015), to a preference for

WOM as a source of information for services than for goods (Murray, 1991), to no difference in the effectiveness of WOM about services versus goods (Babić Rosario et al., 2016)—we propose that WOM about experiential versus material purchases is systematically more conducive to value-creating reactions by the WOM receivers. Although comparing our categorization to other influential ones is not the focus of the present work, it is key to bring to light a unique aspect of the present research, and it helps inform subsequent inquiries into the experiential versus material domain. We elaborate on this topic further in the General Discussion.

Another distinctive feature of the present investigation is that, instead of focusing on either face-to-face (e.g., Arndt, 1967; Bastos, 2019b; Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998) or electronic WOM (e.g., Chintagunta, Gopinath, & Benkataraman, 2010; Dellarocas, Zhang, & Awad, 2007), we examine both. Testing whether the predicted effects hold across the two realms is important because each has particularities (e.g., greater anonymity in eWOM; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004) that could make the effects unique to either. We demonstrate that our effects hold for both communication channels.

Besides these distinctions from previous work in WOM, this investigation also differs in meaningful ways from past research in the experiential versus material purchases literature. Specifically, previous investigations in this domain have mostly focused on the social and psychological benefits that experiences and objects bring to a specific individual—the actual purchaser. For example, relative to material purchases, experiential purchases offer more opportunities for social interaction (Caprariello & Reis, 2013) and keep their appeal for longer due to slower psychological adaptation by the purchaser (Nicolao et al., 2009). The present investigation extends this work by, first, showing that the experiential versus material distinction also influences those who experience the purchase only indirectly, via WOM. Second, it takes the

literature beyond social and psychological benefits by examining a novel type of outcome—people's reactions to WOM that can create value for firms.

Identifying what makes WOM impactful is important because consumers are inundated with large volumes of WOM, of which a considerable proportion is trivial. Consumers often share WOM about mundane or uninteresting topics, which are discussed because they are publically visible, cued by the environment, or simply because they fill conversational space (Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Chung & Darke, 2006; Tannen, 2000). Indeed, when asked to rate the last WOM they had received (7-point scales: unimportant/important, trivial/substantive, and non-significant/significant), a set of survey respondents (MTurk; $N = 51$) indicated an overall score slightly below the scales' midpoint ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.69$), and 53% selected a value equal to or lower than the scale's midpoint, suggesting that roughly half of WOM may be trivial or unimportant. Thus, the present work investigates how WOM can "break through the clutter" and become impactful, advancing theory and providing practical insights for firms and consumers.

Critically, this work also offers an explanation for the greater impact of experiential (vs. material) WOM. To do so, we draw from psychology and introduce to marketing a new construct, which we posit can account for the predicted effect: WOM substantiveness (Mehl, Vazire, Holleran, & Clark, 2010). Following prior theorizing (Mehl et al., 2010, p. 539), we define substantiveness as one's subjective perception of the WOM as "an involved conversation" where "meaningful information [is] exchanged". This construct is unique in that it captures the content of the interaction. More specifically, it taps into whether the WOM involves a profound and substantive conversation or shallow and trivial small talk. Research in psychology has used the substantiveness construct to better understand how everyday conversations affect general happiness and coping (Mehl et al., 2010; Robbins, Lopez, Weihs, & Mehl, 2014). In the present

work, we propose that receivers of WOM perceive WOM about experiences (vs. material objects) as more substantive (vs. trivial), which drives them to respond in value-creating ways.

In addition, we extend knowledge on substantiveness by examining two potential antecedents of the construct. Given that involvement and meaningfulness are the key components of a substantive conversation (Mehl et al., 2010) and that these components are inherently centered on the human element (Ariely, Kamenica, & Prelec, 2008; Rogers, 1961), we focus on the two individuals in the WOM conversation—the receiver and the sender of the information—to theorize about two potential antecedents of substantiveness. Because people tend to experience involvement and attribute meaningfulness to the things that they or others identify with (Bandura, 1989; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Maslow, 1968), we propose that WOM receivers will find the conversation involving and meaningful (i.e., substantive) when they identify with the topic of the conversation (i.e., the purchase under discussion) or perceive that the sender identifies with it. We refer to these self- and other-focused antecedents as self-identification and other-identification. We note that, differently from previous works where self and other are respectively used to refer to the sender and the receiver of WOM (e.g., Berger, 2014; Dichter, 1966; Gatignon & Robertson, 1986), the present work's focus on the recipient places that individual at center stage, hence, for exposition purposes, we use self and other to refer to the WOM recipient and sender respectively.

In sum, this work advances and tests the predictions that receivers of WOM information will exhibit more value-creating reactions when the WOM centers on an experiential than a material purchase; that WOM substantiveness will drive this effect; and that receivers' greater identification with the purchase and/or their perception that the information sender identifies with the purchase will explain the difference in WOM substantiveness—together forming a two-

step, sequential mediation model (Figure 1). Overall, results show that receivers of WOM react more when the WOM is about an experience than an object, and this effect is transmitted via one of the two predicted sequential pathways: self-identification → substantiveness.

—Insert Figure 1 about here—

This manuscript is organized as follows: First, we theorize for the proposed conceptual model. Next, we report five studies employing mediation and moderation approaches to test the predicted model. Last, we discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of the findings, their limitations, and avenues for future research.

2. Conceptual Development

We propose that receivers of WOM about experiential (vs. material) purchases will find the conversation more substantive. Based on Mehl and colleagues' (2010) definition of substantive conversations as *involving* and transmitting *meaningful* information, it follows that these two components—involvement and meaningfulness—are key for understanding substantive WOM. Prior theorizing about involvement and meaningfulness strongly emphasizes the human element (Rogers, 1961). That is, life is involving and meaningful when one is in harmony with the self (Bandura, 1989) and others in the social environment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Hence, in a conversation context, it should follow that when the information receiver identifies and associates the self with the topic of the conversation she will perceive that conversation as more involving and meaningful—a substantive conversation. Similarly, this should occur when the receiver perceives that the other party in the conversation—the information sender—identifies and associates the self with the conversation topic.

Interestingly, the centrality of the self and the other goes beyond conversations in general and also applies in the more specific domain of WOM. Both early and more recent WOM

frameworks hold that consumer conversations are driven by two primary motivations: those associated with the receiver of the WOM, and those associated with the sender (Berger, 2014; Dichter, 1966; Gatignon & Robertson, 1986). According to these frameworks, WOM enables receivers to, for example, seek advice and resolve problems, and it affords senders opportunities for impression management and persuasion.

Based on these perspectives, which place the human element at the center of substantiveness and WOM, we focus on the self (the WOM receiver) and the other (the sender) to theorize about why substantiveness likely varies for experiential versus material WOM. We focus on the two key components of substantiveness—involvement and meaningfulness.

We structure the theoretical discussion as follows: We start by considering the two sequential pathways forming the left side of our model. For the first pathway, we discuss why WOM receivers who identify more with the purchase in discussion (i.e., self-identification) should find the WOM conversation more substantive, and why WOM about experiences (vs. material objects) should evoke greater self-identification. For the second pathway, we discuss why receivers who perceive the purchase to be more related to the teller (i.e., other-identification) should find the WOM conversation more substantive, and why WOM about experiences (vs. material objects) should lead receivers to perceive greater other-identification. Next, focusing on the right side of our model, we discuss why substantive WOM should elicit value-creating reactions from WOM recipients.

2.1. The self/WOM receiver. According to existing frameworks, involvement occurs when a focal stimulus overlaps with the self (Beatty, Kahle, & Homer, 1988; Kapferer & Laurent, 1993). Stimuli that one identifies with are considered personally important (Greenwald, 1981); as such, they are likely to be perceived as involving (Richins & Bloch, 1986). Further, when something

resonates with the self, it is, by definition, in line with the unique set of values and attitudes the individual holds (Sherif & Cantril, 1947); thus, it is likely to be perceived as meaningful. These findings suggest that, when the WOM receiver identifies with the purchase under discussion, she should perceive the WOM as involving and meaningful—that is, substantive.

Previous work indicates that people often integrate purchases into their identity to construct their sense of self (Belk, 1988). With respect to the two purchase types examined here, experiences are intangible and more abstract than objects (Van Boven, 2005). This may enable the WOM receiver to more easily project herself into the other person's experience (vs. object) and, as a result, feel a stronger sense of identification with it. Consistent with this idea, research focused on the purchaser finds that people tend to associate the self more with experiential than material purchases (Carter & Gilovich, 2012).

This greater identification of WOM receivers with experiential (vs. material) purchases may also stem from the fact that experiences score higher than objects on several positive aspects. For instance, experiential pursuits are often perceived positively by others (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011) while material pursuits are often seen negatively and are even stigmatized (Van Boven, Campbell, & Gilovich, 2010). Considering that positive regard is a fundamental human desire (Fiske, 2001; Goffman, 1974; Sedikides, 1993), experiences are likely to be a type of purchase that WOM receivers feel inclined to associate themselves with, leading to a sense of identification. Following this rationale, we propose that WOM about an experiential (vs. material) purchase will engender greater receiver identification with the purchase, which will increase the perceived substantiveness of experiential (vs. material) WOM.

2.2. The other/WOM sender. Alternately, or in addition to receiver identification, WOM may be involving and meaningful (i.e., substantive) for the receiver because of its close association

with the sender. First, several theories in social psychology hold that conversations tend to be deeper and more involving for receivers when senders communicate information about who they are as a person—when they self-disclose (Social Penetration Theory—Altman & Taylor, 1973; Social Exchange Theory—Homans, 1961). Supporting this idea, Christophe and Rimé (1997) find that, as people receive more emotional information about a conversation partner, their nonverbal reactions (e.g., touching) increase, suggesting that involvement increases as receivers learn more about the sender of the information. Corroborating this notion, evidence from a recent meta-analysis indicates that WOM via social media platforms is more effective when senders provide more personal information, which receivers use to gauge homophily (Babić-Rosario et al., 2016). Because experiential purchases are closer to and more representative of the purchaser's (i.e., the sender's) self (Carter & Gilovich, 2012), WOM about experiences is likely to carry more personal information than WOM about objects.

Second, it is widely agreed that contributing to or partaking in the well-being of others is a primary source of meaningfulness (Klein, 2017; Wong, 1998), and conversing is a major way of participating in others' experiences, emotions, and lives in general (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). Since experiences are associated with greater happiness and well-being than objects (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003), WOM about experiences likely makes the interaction feel more positive and meaningful to the receiver. These findings suggest that, when receivers perceive the topic of a WOM conversation to be more related to the sender, they are likely to see the conversation as more involving and meaningful—that is, substantive.

In short, we predict that WOM about experiential purchases will be perceived as more substantive than WOM about material purchases. Further, we conjecture that the degree to which the receiver identifies and/or perceives the sender to identify with the purchase will, individually

or jointly, drive this difference in WOM substantiveness. Next, we discuss how differences in WOM substantiveness should affect receivers' subsequent reactions to the WOM information.

2.3. The Impact of Substantive WOM on Value-Creating Reactions

The last link in the proposed conceptual model posits that more substantive WOM leads to more value-creating reactions from receivers. Both components of substantiveness—involvement and meaningfulness—support this proposition. Specifically, feelings of involvement and meaningfulness tend to propel relevant reaction in accordance with the stimulus that created such feelings (Rothschild, 1984; Stone, 1984). Behaving in accordance with what one finds involving and meaningful is desirable as it helps maintain self-coherence (Cialdini, 2007) and a sense of purpose (Deci & Ryan, 2008), intentionality, and agency (Ryff, 1989). In the context of this investigation, substantive WOM should increase receivers' likelihood of reacting in line with the message. For example, those receiving more substantive WOM may show stronger interest in learning more about the purchase (information acquisition; Stone, 1984), in sharing WOM information with others (De Angelis, Bonezzi, Peluso, Rucker, & Costabile, 2012), and in making a similar purchase themselves (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Overall, we predict that receivers of more substantive WOM will be more likely to react in value-creating ways.

3. Summary and Overview of Studies

In five studies, reported below, we employ various approaches across different samples (student and online populations) to test whether 1) WOM about experiential (vs. material) purchases leads to more value-creating reactions from receivers, 2) this effect is driven by the greater substantiveness of experiential (vs. material) WOM, and 3) self- and/or other-identification with the purchase explain this greater substantiveness of experiential WOM.

Study 1 engages participants in a face-to-face WOM conversation about an experiential or a material purchase and examines receivers' subsequent interest in acquiring more information about the purchase. This study also tests substantiveness as a mediator and rules out purchase cost and pre-existing acquaintanceship as potential alternative accounts. Next, Study 2 employs a recall-based approach to reexamine the model with a different type of value-creating reaction to WOM: consumers' intention to make a similar purchase. This study also rules out two additional rival explanations: risk reduction and uniqueness. Following, Study 3 employs a virtual, computer-mediated WOM conversation to retest these relationships using a different type of value-creating reaction: receivers' intention to share the WOM information with others. Next, Study 4 frames the same purchase as experiential or material and examines the complete sequential-mediation model. Specifically, besides assessing substantiveness, this study measures self- and other-identification with the purchase to test whether either, or both, predict substantiveness. Following Study 4's evidence that self-identification (but not other-identification) drives substantiveness, Study 5 manipulates self-identification to test the mechanism using a process-by-moderation approach (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). These studies provide convergent evidence for the greater impact of WOM about experiences (vs. material objects), and for self-identification and WOM substantiveness as the sequential mechanism underlying this effect.

4. Study 1—Face-to-Face WOM Conversation & Information Search

Study 1 tests whether WOM about experiential (vs. material) purchases elicits greater receivers' interest in acquiring more information about the purchase, and whether WOM substantiveness explains this effect. It does so by engaging participants in a face-to-face conversation with another person assigned to share WOM about an experience or an object.

4.1. Procedure

Undergraduates (N = 190; 42% females; M_{age} = 19.31, SD = 0.96) from a European university volunteered to participate in this 2 (WOM topic: experiential vs. material purchase) by 2 (role: sender vs. receiver) between-subjects study. Only the data from receivers (N = 95) are relevant and thus reported here. Each participant was first given one of two versions of a paper questionnaire. Without yet making it explicit to participants, this procedure paired them up with the person sitting next to them and assigned one member of the pair to the role of WOM sender and the other to the role of receiver in the upcoming WOM conversation. All participants completed the first part of their questionnaire independently. While the receivers completed filler questions, the senders were randomly assigned to recall and write down either an experience or an object they had purchased for about €50. Purchase cost was restricted to control for any effects of market value (Nicolao et al., 2009). Up to this point, participants were kept unaware of the upcoming conversation task to ensure that it did not influence the purchase they recalled.

Next, all participants were informed about the forthcoming WOM activity, who their conversation partner was (i.e., the individual sitting next to them), and the roles of each person in the conversation (sender or receiver). Senders were instructed to tell the other person about their purchase as if they were talking with a friend. Receivers were informed that the other person was going to tell them about a purchase and that they should react as they would in an everyday conversation. To ensure a two-way conversation, the instructions also informed receivers to react and engage however they wished during the conversation (e.g., ask questions, laugh, [dis]agree, etc.), as if they were talking with a friend. The pairs were then instructed to start the conversation and to end it when the experimenter gave them a sound signal. A pre-test on a different sample from the same population indicated that 2.5 minutes was an appropriate amount of time

(participants in the present study were not informed of the time limit to avoid distraction or other effects of timing). After 2.5 minutes, a hand-clap signaled the end of the conversation.

Next, receivers completed the rest of the questionnaire independently. They first answered a two-item measure of WOM substantiveness that we created based on Mehl et al.'s (2010) definition: "The topic that the other person told me about was involving"; "The other person told me meaningful information" (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*; $r = .35$, $p < .001$). Next they completed a four-item measure to assess their interest in acquiring more information about the purchase (e.g., "I am interested in searching for information about this type of experience/object"; $\alpha = .77$).[1]

Due to the room layout, as noted above, participants were paired up with whoever sat next to them, such that conversation pairs were determined by where participants decided to sit, instead of randomly. Thus, previously acquainted participants may have been more likely to sit next to one another and to be paired up, which could affect the results. To control for this possibility, we measured pre-conversation acquaintanceship with the question, "Before having this conversation with that person, how well did you know her/him?" (1 = *Not at All*; 7 = *Very Much*). The results presented below replicate fully when this acquaintanceship measure is used as a covariate in the analyses (see Web Appendix A).

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Information acquisition. An ANOVA with WOM topic predicting information acquisition showed that, as expected, WOM receivers reported greater interest in acquiring more information about the purchase when they had participated in a conversation about an

[1] See Web Appendices A-D for the complete list of items forming the measures in this and the subsequent studies.

experiential (M = 3.64, SD = 1.78) versus a material purchase (M = 2.70, SD = 1.46, $F(1, 93)$ = 7.74, $p < .01$, Cohen's d = 0.58).

4.2.2. Mediation. A bootstrap analysis (PROCESS, model 4; 10,000 resamples—the number of resamples used hereafter; Hayes 2017) tested whether WOM substantiveness mediated the effect of WOM topic on information acquisition. As expected, the indirect effect of WOM topic on information acquisition via WOM substantiveness was significant (b = 0.37, SE = 0.17, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.78]; see Figure 2).[2]

—Insert Figure 2 about here—

4.3. Discussion

This study shows that, after engaging in a face-to-face WOM conversation, receivers are more interested in acquiring additional information about the discussed purchase when it is an experience rather than an object; and the greater substantiveness of WOM about experiential (vs. material) purchases explains this difference. Additionally, Study 1 rules out purchase cost and pre-existing acquaintanceship as potential alternative accounts.

However, this study has some important limitations. Since participants were not randomly assigned to a conversation partner, confounds other than acquaintanceship may be a concern. Further, Study 1 limited the conversation to a single purchase example. Everyday conversations are likely to be richer in content and have a more dynamic style, where discussion about a certain purchase leads to additional discussion about related ones (Bruns, 2012). Hence, it is interesting to examine whether results hold for conversations where more than one experience (object) is discussed. Study 2 was designed to tackle these topics.

5. Study 2—Recalled WOM Conversation & Purchase Intention

[2] See Web Appendices A-D for the reporting of all links in this mediation analysis and those in our subsequent studies.

Study 2 tests the replicability of Study 1 with a recall-based procedure where participants reported on a past WOM conversation in which someone shared with them about experiential or material purchases. Because these conversations occurred within the context of people's regular lives, they represent naturally-occurring WOM, which, together with Study 1, provides high realism to our empirical tests (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994). Further, this naturalistic approach helps assuage concerns with Study 1's arrangements of conversation partners.

In addition, Study 2 addresses two potential alternative explanations for our findings: risk reduction and uniqueness. As a source of purchase-related information, word-of-mouth can be a risk reduction tool (Dichter, 1966; Roselius, 1971). Research examining different types of purchases has found mixed results in terms of which type benefits more from WOM information. Precisely, a recent meta-analysis theorizes for and finds that, as an information search tool, eWOM has a greater impact on the sales of durable versus non-durable purchases (You et al., 2015). Differently, earlier research finds that personal sources of information are preferred and perceived as more important and credible for purchases of services than those of tangible goods (Murray, 1991). Further, additional meta-analysis work finds no difference in the effectiveness of WOM about goods versus services (Babić Rosario et al., 2016). Hence, while the evidence thus far is inconclusive, it is possible that risk reduction is an alternative mechanism in our model.

Additionally, uniqueness could be behind the effects in our model. This could happen in two subtly distinct ways. First, because experiential purchases are more often perceived as unique than material purchases (Bastos, 2019a; Bastos & Brucks, 2017; Rosenzweig & Gilovich, 2012), WOM about experiences could be particularly powerful in promoting favorable consumer reactions. Thus, purchase uniqueness could drive the effect. Second, instead of communicating to the information receiver that experiences are more unique than objects, WOM about those

purchases could evoke in that person a desire for uniqueness. Thus, need for uniqueness could explain the effect in our model. We examine uniqueness from both perspectives.

5.1. Procedures

One hundred and fifty participants from the United States or Canada were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (51% females, M_{age} = 37.94, *SD* = 12.56) to complete the study for financial compensation. Employing a between-subjects design, the study randomly assigned participants to the experiential (*n* = 76) or the material WOM condition (*n* = 74). Participants were asked to recall and describe a recent conversation with someone who shared with them about experiences (vs. material objects) that that person had purchased. Following this, participants answered the same two-item measure of WOM substantiveness ($r = .72$, $p < .001$) and a three-item measure of purchase intention (e.g., "In the future, I will likely purchase experiences/objects similar to that person's"; 1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*; α = .90). Additionally, to assess the potential alternative explanations mentioned above, the study employed a three-item measure of risk reduction based on terms associated with perceived risk borrowed from previous research (e.g., "To me, the conversation with that person helped lower the risks associated with those types of experiences/objects"; α = .88; Campbell & Goodstein, 2001), Bastos and Brucks' (2017) three-item measure of purchase uniqueness (e.g., "That person's experiences/objects are unique"; α = .88), and Snyder and Fromkin's (1977) 32-item measure of need for uniqueness (e.g., "I would rather be just like everyone else than be called a "freak""; α = .74). Participants completed the measures of these three potential alternative mediators using 7-point scales (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*).

5.2. Results

Seventeen participants were removed from all analyses for failing the attention-check question.

5.2.1. Purchase intention. As predicted, participants indicated greater interest in making a similar purchase when they had received WOM about experiential (M = 5.40, SD = 1.47) versus material purchases (M = 4.85, SD = 1.63, $F(1, 131) = 4.18$, p = .04, Cohen's d = 0.35).

5.2.2. Mediation. A parallel multiple mediation analysis (PROCESS, model 4) with WOM topic as independent variable, purchase intention as dependent variable, and WOM substantiveness, risk reduction, purchase uniqueness, and need for uniqueness as mediators showed WOM substantiveness as the only significant mechanism (b = 0.31, SE = 0.12, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.56]). None of the other paths transmitted the effect as their confidence intervals included zero (Figure 3).

—Insert Figure 3 about here—

5.3. Discussion

Using a recall-based procedure, Study 2 replicates Study 1. Participants who recalled a conversation about another person's experiential versus material purchases indicated greater interest in making a similar purchase, and this effect was explained by the greater substantiveness of conversations about experiences. This study ruled out risk reduction and uniqueness as potential alternative accounts in our model.

Thus far, the evidence converges on the findings that WOM about experiential purchases generates desirable consumer reactions more than does WOM about material purchases, and WOM substantiveness helps explain this difference. However, because WOM senders in Study 1 and receivers in Study 2 were free to recall any experiential or material purchase, the analyses may have compared WOM about purchases that are incompatible (e.g., a movie vs. a pair of

tennis shoes). Further, although Studies 1 and 2 afford high realism in terms of WOM conversations, the benefits of examining interpersonal interaction in a more naturalistic context (at real time—Study 1, or recalled—Study 2) open these studies to another important limitation: various communication-related factors known to affect the outcome of such interactions remained unaccounted for (e.g., tone of voice, touching, body language, physical distance from the conversation partner, and level of details; Argyle, 1972; Mehrabian, 2008). Study 3 was designed to address these limitations.

6. Study 3—Computer Mediated WOM & Sharing WOM Information with Others

This study has four goals. First, to help neutralize idiosyncrasies between the experiential and material purchases considered in Studies 1 and 2, this study holds the purchase category constant (music-related purchases: a music concert vs. a music electronic device). Second, to account for various factors known to affect communication (e.g., body language), this study uses a computer mediated approach. Third, to increase the generalizability of the findings, Study 3 tests the effects observed in Studies 1 and 2 using a different value-creating reaction: people's interest in passing on to others the WOM information they received. Finally, to further address potential confounds in Study 1 due to lack of random assignment to a conversation partner, this study assigns participants to an unknown (in fact, fictitious) partner.

6.1. Procedures

Two hundred and three graduate business students from a European university (57% females, M_{age} = 22.96, SD = 1.71) participated in this single factor between-subjects study (WOM topic: experiential vs. material purchase) for course credit. First, participants were told that the researchers were interested in interpersonal conversation in an online context, and that they would be testing out a chat platform with a conversation partner who was in the laboratory

next door. They read that their partner had been given a topic to tell them about, and that they would converse with and respond to their partner by selecting sentences or questions generated by the chat platform. They were then asked to click 'next' to connect to their partner. In reality, participants did not have a conversation partner; instead, we designed the questionnaire so that participants received pre-programmed replies from their "partner" that fit the sentence/question they (participants) had chosen to send. To maintain realism, during the conversation there were timed pauses between answers, as if the conversation partner was typing their replies.

Following a 3-second wait to be connected with their conversation partner, participants first engaged in basic introductions (e.g., "Hi! How are you?"). Participants then selected and sent one of two questions about the topic their partner was to tell them about (e.g., "I was told that you had a topic to tell me about? What is it?"). At this point, the questionnaire randomly assigned participants to the experiential (n = 99) or material WOM condition (n = 104). Those in the experiential (vs. material) condition received the reply message: "Yes, sure. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money on an experience (object). I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I went to the concert of a music band I really like (I went to a store and bought an MP3 player I really like). It's called X-51. What a cool concert (player)! It had everything I wanted from a concert (player) like that. You can imagine, right?".

Participants then engaged in one more exchange with their partner. They asked the partner to say more about the purchase and received additional information about the concert (MP3 player), in accordance with the WOM topic condition they had been assigned (Web Appendix C). Next, participants ended the conversation by sending the message, "Got it. Thanks for telling me about it. I wish you a good day."

The questionnaire then informed participants that the conversation was over and that they were no longer connected with the other person. To prevent suspicion that the other person could observe their answers to the upcoming questions, the questionnaire assured participants that "Your answers are anonymous and only the researchers will see them at a later time."

Participants answered the same two-item measure of WOM substantiveness from Studies 1 and 2 ($r = .64$, $p < .001$) and a two-item measure of intentions to share with others the WOM information they had received (e.g., "I am likely to tell other people about this experience/object"; $r = .75$, $p < .001$).

6.2. Results

6.2.1. Sharing of WOM information. Participants indicated greater likelihood of sharing with others when they had received WOM information about the experiential ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.43$) versus the material purchase ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.46$, $F(1, 201) = 4.72$, $p = .03$, Cohen's $d = 0.30$).

6.2.2. Mediation. A mediation analysis (PROCESS, model 4) showed that the indirect effect of WOM topic on sharing via WOM substantiveness was statistically significant ($b = 0.45$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI = [0.24, 0.70]; Figure 4).

—Insert Figure 4 about here—

6.3. Discussion

Holding constant the purchase category (experiential and material purchases associated with music), Study 3 replicates the findings from Studies 1 and 2. Further, this study increases the generalizability of the findings by examining a different value-creating outcome: sharing of WOM information. Additionally, the approach of keeping the purchase category the same across conditions helps address the issue of purchase (in)compatibility in the previous studies. Also, the

computer-mediated approach used here neutralizes various factors known to influence communication that had remained unaccounted for in Studies 1 and 2. Finally, because there was no acquaintanceship between participants and their conversation partners, this study minimizes concerns associated with non-random assignment of conversation partners in Study 1.

The evidence presented thus far supports the prediction that experiential (vs. material) WOM is more substantive, and that substantive WOM elicits reactions that are valuable for the firm. In light of this, it is informative for theory and practice to understand precisely what makes WOM substantive. Study 4 examines our proposition that self- and/or other-identification with the purchase in discussion drive WOM substantiveness.

Further, the results from Studies 1-3 suggest that if firms aim to elicit value-creating reactions from receivers of WOM, those offering experiences (vs. objects) are at an advantage. This leaves a considerable proportion of firms with less to gain from WOM—i.e., those providing material purchases. Thus, Study 4 adopts a framing procedure that firms could potentially use to increase the perceived substantiveness of WOM about material purchases. Besides its practical implications, this approach brings additional experimental control by using the very same purchase across conditions and only framing it in experiential or material terms.

7. Study 4—Framing Intervention to Test the Sequential Mediation Effect

This study has three objectives. First, it uses a framing procedure to test whether focusing WOM on the experiential versus material aspects of the same purchase produces the effects observed in Studies 1-3. Second, by keeping the focal purchase constant and manipulating only the way it is presented to participants (as an experience or an object; Bastos, 2019a; Bastos & Brucks, 2017), this study introduces another level of control over the purchase under

consideration, thereby adding rigor to our empirical work. Third, this study examines the model in its entirety by testing whether self- and/or other-identification drive WOM substantiveness.

7.1. Procedures

Ninety-five graduate business students from a European university (58% females, M_{age} = 22.74, SD = 1.48) participated in this single factor between-subjects study (WOM topic: experiential vs. material purchase) for course credit. The study proceeded similarly to Study 3. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and then connected with their conversation partner. After a brief introduction, participants were randomly assigned to a WOM topic condition. Following participants' request that the partner tell them about the topic they had been given to share, those in the experiential (n = 48) (vs. material [n = 47]) condition received the following message: "Yes, that's right. They asked me to tell you about a time when I spent money, basically, to have an experience (object). I can tell you about one purchase I clearly remember. This happened about 7 months ago. I got a BBQ grill called BBQ X. You know, in my mind a grill is really about having a nice experience (object) at home. I've enjoyed using (owning) it a lot. What a cool experience (object)! I could tell you the details of that BBQ experience (object), but I guess you can imagine it, right?".

Next, in reply to participants' request for more information about the grill, the questionnaire showed experiential (material) condition participants another framing-based message focusing on either the experiential or the material aspects of the BBQ grill (Web Appendix D). Finally, participants ended the conversation by sending the message: "Got it. Thanks for telling me about it. I wish you a great day."

After being disconnected from their conversation partner and assured that their answers were anonymous, participants completed four-item measures of self- and [other-] identification

(e.g., "I identify [The other person identifies] with this person's [their] experience/object"; α = .93 [α =. 90]), the same two-item measure of WOM substantiveness (r = .64, p < .001), and the three-item measure of purchase intention used in Study 2 (α = .90). Last, they answered a two-item measure serving as manipulation check ("The grill they described earlier is:" 1 = *Definitely a material object*; 7 = *Definitely an experience*; "That grill is:" 1 = *Something tangible that one can keep in his/her possession;* 7 = *Something that enables experiences; r* = .66, p < .001).

7.2. Results

7.2.1. Manipulation check. Confirming the success of the framing manipulation, experiential condition participants perceived the BBQ grill as significantly more experiential (M = 4.65, SD = 1.65) than did material condition participants (M = 3.25, SD = 1.78, F(1, 93) = 15.73, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.82).

7.2.2. Purchase intention. Participants who received WOM focusing on the experiential aspects of the BBQ grill reported significantly greater intention to purchase a similar grill (M = 3.95, SD = 1.64) than did those who received WOM focusing on its material aspects (M = 2.80, SD = 1.49, F(1, 93) = 12.71, p = .001, Cohen's d = 0.73).

7.2.3. Sequential mediation. An analysis of mediation tested whether the effect of WOM topic (0 = material; 1 experiential) on purchase intention was mediated by either, or both, sequential mediation pathways, where either self-identification and/or other-identification first predict WOM substantiveness, which then predicts purchase intention. The analysis (using PROCESS, model 80) treated WOM topic as the independent variable, self- and other-identification as potential mediators at step 1 of the two-step mediation, WOM substantiveness as the potential mediator at step 2, and purchase intention as the dependent variable.

Results showed that the effect of WOM topic on purchase intention was transmitted by the two-step pathway 'self-identification → WOM substantiveness' (*b* = 0.27, *SE* = 0.10, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.51]), but not by the two-step pathway 'other-identification → WOM substantiveness' (*b* = 0.04, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [−0.01, 0.16]; Figure 5).

—Insert Figure 5 about here—

7.3. Discussion

Using a framing procedure, Study 4 shows that WOM centered on the experiential aspects of a purchase is perceived as more substantive than WOM centered on its material aspects. Substantiveness, in turn, increases receivers' intentions to acquire a similar purchase. The framing approach used in this study complements Study 3 in addressing the issue of purchase (in)compatibility and other potential confounds related to differences between experiential and material purchases. This approach is also managerially actionable and practical for firms, a topic we elaborate on in the General Discussion.

Critically, this study also sheds light on what drives WOM substantiveness. The data show that receivers' identification with the purchase is a significant predictor of substantiveness, while their perception that the sender identification with the purchase is not. These results imply that when receivers identify similarly with an experiential and a material purchase, they should find WOM about the two purchases equally substantive and, consequently, should react similarly to both. Study 5 examines this possibility.

8. Study 5—Manipulation of Self-Identification

This study employs a recall-based procedure similar to Study 2's in search of two objectives. First, it aims to examine the two-step mechanism using a process-by-moderation approach (Spencer et al., 2005). To do so, rather than measuring all variables, Study 5

manipulates the first mediator shown to drive the effect in Study 4—self-identification—and examines whether this manipulation affects the second mediator—WOM substantiveness—and, in turn, the outcome variable. In the control condition, where self-identification is not manipulated, we expect a replication of the prior results, where WOM about experiential (vs. material) purchases is perceived as more substantive and leads to more value-creating reactions. In the identification condition, where self-identification is high for both the experiential and the material purchase in the WOM, we expect these differences to attenuate or disappear. Hence, Study 5 should yield an interaction of WOM topic and self-identification.

Second, rather than capturing reactions associated with interest or behavior intention (Studies 1-4), this study assesses receiver reaction via an actual decision. Specifically, it measures participants' decision to share the WOM information with others using a real choice, where participants select a purchase to write a review about.

8.1. Procedures

One hundred and two participants recruited from Mturk (74% females, M_{age} = 34.68, *SD* = 10.99) completed the study for financial compensation. This study manipulated self-identification as a between-subjects factor (control vs. identification) and WOM topic as a within-subjects factor (experiential vs. material purchase). Participants were randomly assigned to the control or the identification condition. The study script in both conditions introduced participants to the idea that "In our conversations with other people, they sometimes tell us about an object or an experience they have purchased." Participants read definitions of the two purchase types, and were asked to recall two conversations they had had in the last 12 months with two different people, where one told them about an object and the other told them about an experience they had purchased.

To manipulate receivers' identification with the purchase, the script in the identification condition informed participants that, "Important: The object and the experience those people told you are ones you identify with. In other words, to you, both the experience and the object feel equally connected to your sense of self and, in many ways, they equally reflect who you are as a person." Participants in the control condition were not shown this information.

Next, all participants were provided two text slots in which to describe, in some detail, what the other person had told them about the experience and the object (the slot for the experience and that for the object appeared in random order). As part of the manipulation, participants in the identification condition (but not those in the control condition) were provided a third slot and asked to "Please explain why you identified with both the object and the experience equally" (this slot always appeared after the first two).

Following this writing part, participants answered a four-item measure of self-identification that served as a manipulation check ("Between the two [purchases], the one that…" "1. …I identify with is:"; "2. …is related to me:"; "3. … Reflects who I am as a person:"; "4. … I can imagine being part of me:"; 1 = *The Object*; 7 = *The Experience*; the answer options were counterbalanced for each item; $\alpha = .75$). Next, they answered a two-item measure of substantiveness ("The topic was involving in the conversation about:"; "The other person told me meaningful information in the conversation about:"; 1 = *The Object*; 7 = *The Experience*; $r = .32$, $p < .01$).

To measure the outcome variable, the questionnaire informed participants that, "In this study we are partnering up with several firms that sell different kinds of object and experiences. Some of our partner firms sell experiences and objects similar to the one the other people told you about. Our partner firms would like to get the views of people who have had that object or

experience, or have heard about it from somebody else. The firms are collecting this information to post on their website as anonymous recommendations." Participants were then asked to indicate whether they would prefer to write about the experience, the object, or whether they were equally excited to write about either.

8.2. Results

Twenty-four participants were removed from all analyses for failing the attention-check question (n = 11) or writing about a topic unrelated to the study (n = 13).

8.2.1. Manipulation check. As expected, control condition participants reported significantly greater self-identification with the experiential than the material purchase (M = 4.59, SD = 1.19, $t(48) = 3.50$, $p < .01$, 95% CI = [0.25, 0.93]). Further, as intended by the manipulation, identification condition participants self-identified equally strongly with the experience and the object (M = 4.15, SD = 1.07), a value that is statistically indistinguishable from the scale's mid-point of 4 ($t(28) = 0.77$, p = .45, 95% CI = [−0.25, 0.56]).

8.2.2. WOM substantiveness. In the control condition, and replicating previous results, participants attributed greater substantiveness to WOM about experiences versus objects (M = 4.71, SD = 1.26, $t(48) = 3.96$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.35, 1.07]). Identification condition participants indicated equivalent substantiveness for experiential and material WOM (M = 4.15, SD = 1.01), a value that is statistically indistinguishable from the scale's midpoint of 4 ($t(28) = 0.82$, p = .42, 95% CI = [−0.23, 0.54]).

8.2.3. Sharing. We performed two z-tests to examine whether, among participants who picked one of the two purchases to write a review (63%), those in the control condition selected the experience (vs. object) more often, and whether this difference was neutralized in the identification condition. As expected, in the control condition, a majority of participants selected

an experience to write about (66%), a proportion that is marginally different from the indifference value of 50% ($z = 1.81$, $p = .07$, 95% CI = [47.19%, 81.73%]). Conversely, and supporting our predictions, in the identification condition the preference for writing about an experience disappeared (59%, $z = 0.74$, $p = .46$, 95% CI = [33.08%, 81.69%]; Figure 6).

—Insert Figure 6 about here—

8.3. Discussion

This study manipulates receiver's self-identification with the purchase under discussion and, replicating Study 4, provides evidence of a different nature that this factor drives WOM substantiveness. Specifically, Study 5 shows that when receivers identify equally with an experience and an object, they perceive WOM about both as similarly substantive and, consequently, are equally inclined to spread WOM about them. Adding to Study 4's mediation-based evidence, this study offers moderation-based evidence for the process, thereby enhancing confidence in the model (Spencer et al., 2005). Of note, this study uses a consequential choice involving an outcome of much interest to firms—consumers' willingness to write reviews and recommend purchases to others based on prior WOM (De Angelis et al., 2012).

9. General Discussion

Firms have become increasingly aware of the importance of WOM. The power of consumer conversation also finds advocates in academic circles, with scholars advising that "Products and services should be designed with talking points in mind, to stimulate word-of-mouth and social-media-based conversations" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 362). But what type of WOM gets consumers to react in ways that can benefit the firm? The present investigation shows that the purchase type categorization (experiential vs. material purchase) is a reliable predictor of how WOM impacts receivers. Evidence from five studies indicates that WOM

centered on an experience (vs. an object) is better able to elicit desired consumer reactions, including information acquisition, purchase intentions, and intended as well as actual sharing of the WOM information with others (see Web Appendix E for a single-paper meta-analysis summarizing this result across Studies 1-4; McShane & Böckenholt, 2017). Additionally, our results demonstrate that the greater substantiveness of experiential (vs. material) WOM explains this effect. Further, this work identifies a key antecedent of WOM substantiveness. We explore whether receivers' identification with the purchase (i.e., self-identification) and/or their perception that the sender identifies with the purchase (i.e., other-identification) independently or jointly predict WOM substantiveness. Mediation- and moderation-based evidence converge on receiver-identification (but not sender-identification) as a key driver.

Methodologically, these studies used several different approaches, including face-to-face (Study 1), computer-mediated (Studies 3 and 4), and recalled conversations (Studies 2 and 5). The procedures used in Studies 1, 3, and 4 to operationalize WOM offer a high degree of realism at the independent variable level. Further, by capturing different forms of consumer reactions to WOM, including participants' actual choice of which purchase to write a review about (Study 5), this work demonstrates generalizability and consequentiality at the dependent variable level. Also, the five studies were performed across substantially different samples. The consistent results observed across these approaches and populations speak to the robustness of the findings.

9.1. Theoretical Contributions

This research provides several contributions to theory. Past work in WOM has examined why consumers share (Berger, 2013; Cheung, Anitsal, & Anitsal, 2007; Fazal-e-Hasan, Lings, Mortimer, & Neale, 2017; Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2007), the content they share (Argo, White, & Dahl, 2006; Fong & Burton, 2008; Jun, Cha, & Aggarwal, 2011; Moore, 2012), and the

channels they use to share (Berger & Iyengar, 2013; Chen & Kirmani, 2015). By examining WOM's ability to elicit various types of favorable consumer reactions, the present investigation shows that the experiential versus material purchase categorization is a reliable determinant of WOM's ability to impact receivers.

Interestingly, this result emerges in instances when individuals had spontaneously shared WOM information with the participants of our studies (as in the recalled WOM conversations in Studies 2 and 5) as well as when the study explicitly told participants that the information sender had been given a topic and had been instructed to share about it with them (as in the face-to-face conversation in Study 1, and the computer-mediated conversations in Studies 3 and 4). This is important because recent research in WOM has conjectured the possibility that "[t]he motives of the eWOM sender may affect how a message is perceived by its recipients and thus may have an impact on eWOM effectiveness (You et al., 2015, p. 27)." Our data inform that our model applies for organic WOM (WOM that people feel intrinsically motivated to share about) as well as incentivized WOM (WOM that results from firms' initiatives designed to encourage people to share); a finding relevant to theory and practice alike.

This work also shows that the experiential versus material categorization is especially suitable for investigation in the WOM domain. As we discussed earlier, a key distinction between this categorization and earlier ones is its subjective nature. It is possible that the mixed findings obtained in earlier research on whether WOM about goods versus services differ in terms of its impact result from their inherently objective approach to categorize the purchases in discussion. For optimal functionality, such objectivity would require that researchers and study participants systematically agree in their perceptions of a focal purchase. Recognizing that different people are likely to view the same purchase differently helps the experiential versus material

categorization overcome such challenges. Introducing this categorization to the domain of WOM's impact may therefore be a step towards greater clarity and more consistent findings.

However, our categorization of purchases along the experiential-material continuum is also distinct from another common approach in WOM research—that focusing on specific examples of purchases—e.g., digital cameras (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011), beer (Clemons, Gao, & Hitt, 2006), books (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006), and movies (Liu, 2006)—with the latter two purchase examples (books and movies) figuring prominently. Reflecting this, books and movies account respectively for 39% and 20% of the purchase categories in a recent meta-analysis (Babić Rosario et al., 2016), and books account for 33% of the purchase categories in another work of the same type (Floyd et al., 2014). Although such efforts provide invaluable insight to academics and managers in specific industries, their limited generalizability has generated comments such as "we encourage researchers to enlarge the scope of eWOM research in terms of platforms and product categories" (Babić Rosario et al., 2016, p. 315). The experiential versus material purchase categorization can address calls of this sort because it is applicable in myriad theoretical and practical contexts and can encompass most, if not all purchases sold in the marketplace in a parsimonious, two-category manner.

Additionally, complementing previous WOM work focused primarily on sales (see Babić Rosario et al. [2016]; Floyd et al. [2014]; You et al. [2015] for reviews), the present investigation examines a broader set of value-creating reactions to WOM. This is important for at least two reasons: First, our more inclusive approach to the outcome variable allows us to demonstrate the wider consequentiality of different WOM content beyond the bottom-line and in domains that are of primary interest to researchers and managers, either in their own right or as a means to sales. Illustrating the latter, when people share forward WOM information that they received, they are

naturally increasing WOM volume, which has been shown to increase sales (Babić Rosario et al., 2016). Second, some of the outcomes examined here—e.g., information seeking—are related to sunk costs. This is relevant because recent evidence suggests that perceived sunk costs influence the impact of negative eWOM, such that negative eWOM's influence is attenuated when consumers spend much time searching for information about a purchase for the near future (Golmohammadi, Mattila, & Gauri, 2020). Therefore, it is informative to know when consumers are more likely to engage in behaviors associated with sunk costs. Our results show that one such instance is when they receive WOM about experiential versus material purchases.

By examining how WOM about experiences versus material objects impact the information *receiver*, this work also extends the experiential versus material purchases literature beyond the actual purchaser, where the literature has almost entirely focused on thus far (for exceptions, see Bastos [2020a], and Bastos & Barsade [2020]). This finding is important because it shows that the predictive potential of the purchase type category goes beyond the person making (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) and telling others about their purchases (Bastos & Brucks, 2017; Kumar & Gilovich, 2015) to include also those exposed to the purchase only indirectly, via WOM. In other words, we show that the predictive power of this purchase type categorization is wider than previously known.

Further, the present work identifies the process underlying the observed effect: WOM substantiveness, and provides a more complete understanding of the mechanism by showing an antecedent of WOM substantiveness: receivers' identification with the purchase in discussion.

The finding that substantiveness in WOM is associated with the self extends existing knowledge about consumer conversation. Previous theorizing on what motivates senders to talk about their purchases has considered the self and others, and has argued that self-serving

motivations are primarily responsible for why people share WOM (Berger, 2014). Empirical evidence supports this argument, with motivations such as self-enhancement (De Angelis et al., 2012) and need for uniqueness (Cheema & Kaikati, 2010) influencing people's likelihood of telling others about their purchases. However, relatively little is known about what motivates receivers to react to WOM in ways that benefit the firm. The present work takes a similar approach by studying both the self and the other (i.e., receiver- and sender-identification), and shows that the self is also key from the receiver's perspective. In other words, the self drives not only the likelihood of WOM being shared—as shown in previous research—but also its potential to impact receivers.

In addition, this investigation extends prior research in psychology, which has examined how substantive conversations affect people's psychological well-being—an emotion-based outcome (Mehl et al., 2010; Robbins et al., 2014). The present paper shows that substantiveness affects people in a different way, by influencing how they react to purchase-related information—a behavior-based outcome.

9.2. Managerial Contributions

The findings of this research also have implications for practice. Firms often undertake creative and expensive initiatives to increase the WOM potential of their offerings. To motivate consumers to converse, Coca-Cola replaced its own brand name with the names of regular people on its packaging (the Share a Coke campaign); Milka invested in a whole new production line that could extract one square from a multi-square chocolate bar (the Last Square campaign), and Princess Cruises provided guests with free delivery of firm-designed postcards. These efforts are justifiable; after all, when consumers tell others about their purchases, the firm is gifted with free advertising (Buttle, 1998) that has both high credibility (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993) and a self-

propagating capacity not found in traditional advertisements (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Indeed, WOM is believed to drive up to 50% of purchase decisions and to produce more than double the sales of paid advertising (Bughin, Doogan, & Vetvik, 2010; Fay, Keller, Larkin, & Pauwels, 2019)—clearly, WOM is a tool for firms to elicit value-creating reactions from those receiving it.

However, as this investigation shows, some types of WOM are better at eliciting valuable reactions than others. Specifically, WOM about experiential (vs. material) purchases is more likely to lead to relevant reactions. Interestingly, Study 4 demonstrates that even the very same purchase can generate more impactful WOM if the conversation focuses on that purchase's experiential rather than its material aspects. How can managers encourage experience-centered WOM? Research has shown that consumers tend to share content that is top-of-mind or that is cued by the environment (Berger & Schwartz, 2011); therefore managers can facilitate impactful WOM by focusing their communication efforts (e.g., advertising) on the experiential aspects of their products, offering consumers conversational materials centered on the experiential dimensions of the company's offerings, or providing retrievable information that may serve to remind consumers of a product's experiential properties.

The knowledge advanced here is relevant for consumers as well. Previous theorizing in WOM notes that persuading others is a key reason why people share WOM (Berger, 2014). The current findings suggest that if senders wish to be persuasive (e.g., getting friends to purchase a similar item), they will be more successful by focusing the conversation on content that overlaps with the receiver's sense of self. When the sender possesses knowledge about the receiver's personal values, goals, or interests—i.e., who the receiver is as a person—she can tailor the WOM message so that the receiver perceives the purchase as more related to his sense of self.

This should make the WOM conversation more substantive and better able to elicit reactions from the receiver in accordance with the WOM information.

9.3. Future Research

This work opens up several pathways for additional discoveries. We trust that introducing WOM substantiveness in the WOM domain will spur further research. For example, whereas the online chat approach in Studies 3 and 4 provides rigor and mirrors an existing and growing type of technology-mediated conversation (Barnes & Pressey, 2012), this mode of communication does not afford the richness of in-person WOM. At the same time, asynchronous channels (e.g., computer-mediated) have been found to elicit the exchange of more interesting content than synchronous channels (e.g., in-person), as they allow people to more carefully choose what to say (Berger & Iyengar, 2013). It is possible that, in a more naturalistic setting where senders have the freedom and time to decide what to say, asynchronous channels enhance the otherwise modest substantiveness of WOM about material objects and, consequently, its ability to elicit value-creating reactions from receivers. Thus, rather than using pre-set scripts, future research could engage participants in a realistic online WOM conversation with another (real) person.

Further, consistent with much of the WOM literature (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Sheth, 1971), this investigation takes the receiver's perspective to identify what makes WOM substantive. However, senders' perceptions of substantiveness could be tested to see whether these mirror receivers' perceptions, or whether they are driven by a factor other than self-identification with the purchase. For example, because individualistic consumers are strongly driven by the opportunity to self-enhance via WOM (Wien & Olsen, 2014), it is possible that their perception of having improved their social image, rather than their identification with the purchase, determines how substantive they consider a WOM conversation.

In addition, building on the present finding that WOM focused on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a purchase is more impactful, research could examine whether this effect extends beyond WOM. For example, considering recent research on skepticism and persuasiveness in advertising (Hernandez, Wright, & Affonso, 2019), it would be interesting to test whether ads focusing on the experiential (vs. material) properties of a purchase face less skepticism and become more persuasive, perhaps because they are viewed as overlapping more with the receiver's self and, therefore, worthy of trust.

Further, given the growing number of mechanisms behind WOM's impact (e.g., substantiveness, risk reduction), the literature can benefit from research testing qualifiers of these mechanisms. Whereas, in our model, WOM substantiveness predominates as the explanation, certain circumstances might attenuate its explanatory power in favor of other mechanisms. For example, when a purchase is unfamiliar, uncommon, or infrequent (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014), or when it requires large monetary investment (You et al., 2015), it is possible that reducing the associated risks takes precedence over the substantiveness of the WOM.

Considering again computer-mediated WOM, a final possibility for future research could be to examine strategies that firms and consumers can employ to overcome the restrictions imposed by some social media platforms and still communicate substantively. For example, some platforms restrict message length (e.g., Twitter), while other platforms limit the options available for communicating (e.g., Facebook's six emoji reactions). However, firms and consumers may be able to use particular content (e.g., explaining language; Moore, 2015) to enable substantive conversations, even with such restrictions. Additionally, restricted platforms might enable substantive conversations in a different way. For example, estimates indicate that 59% of text messages are phatic in nature; they simply intend to convey that the sender is

thinking of the receiver (Rettie, 2009). By putting the receiver at the center of the conversation, this mode of conversation may elicit interest and involvement, and consequently lead to value-creating reactions. Coca-Cola's Share a Coke campaign seems inspired precisely by these ideas.

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Figure Legend

Figure 1. The Predicted Sequential Mediation Model

Figure 2. Mediation Model—Results of Study 1

Figure 3. Parallel Multiple Mediator Mediation Model—Results of Study 2

Figure 4. Mediation Model—Results of Study 3

Figure 5. Sequential Mediation Model—Results of Study 4

Figure 6. Likelihood of Choosing an Experience to Write a Review—Results of Study 5

Figure 1. The Predicted Sequential Mediation Model

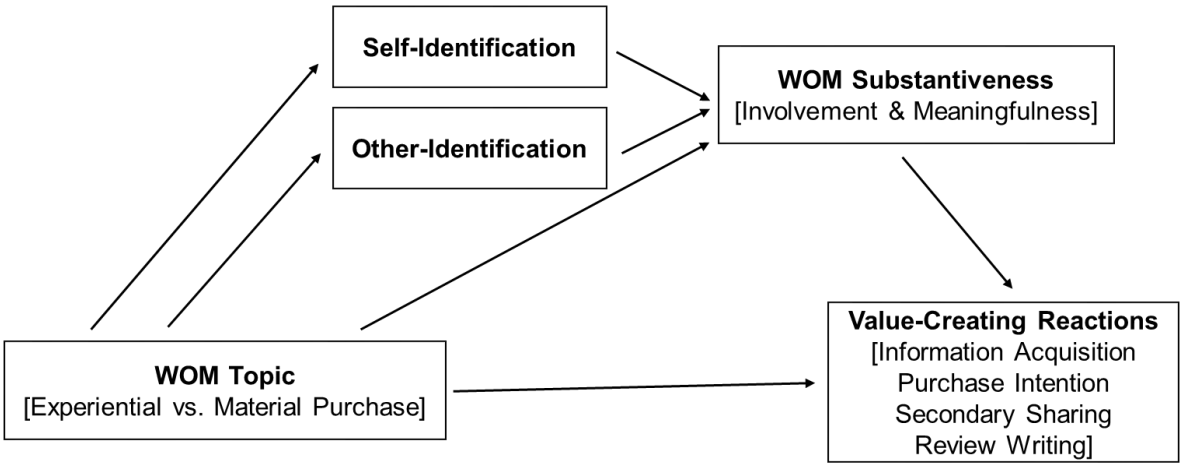
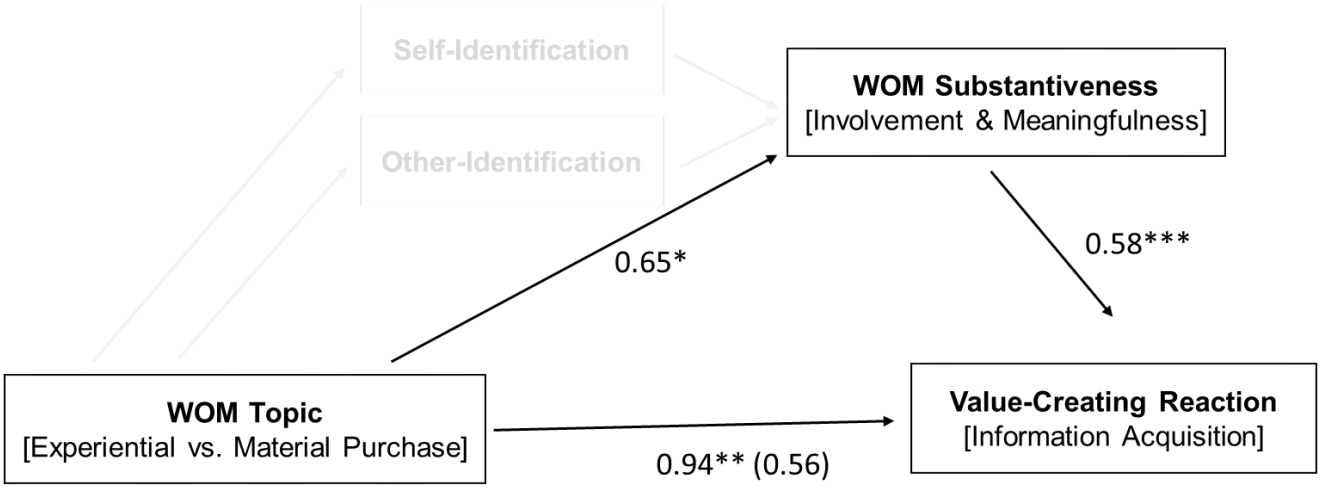
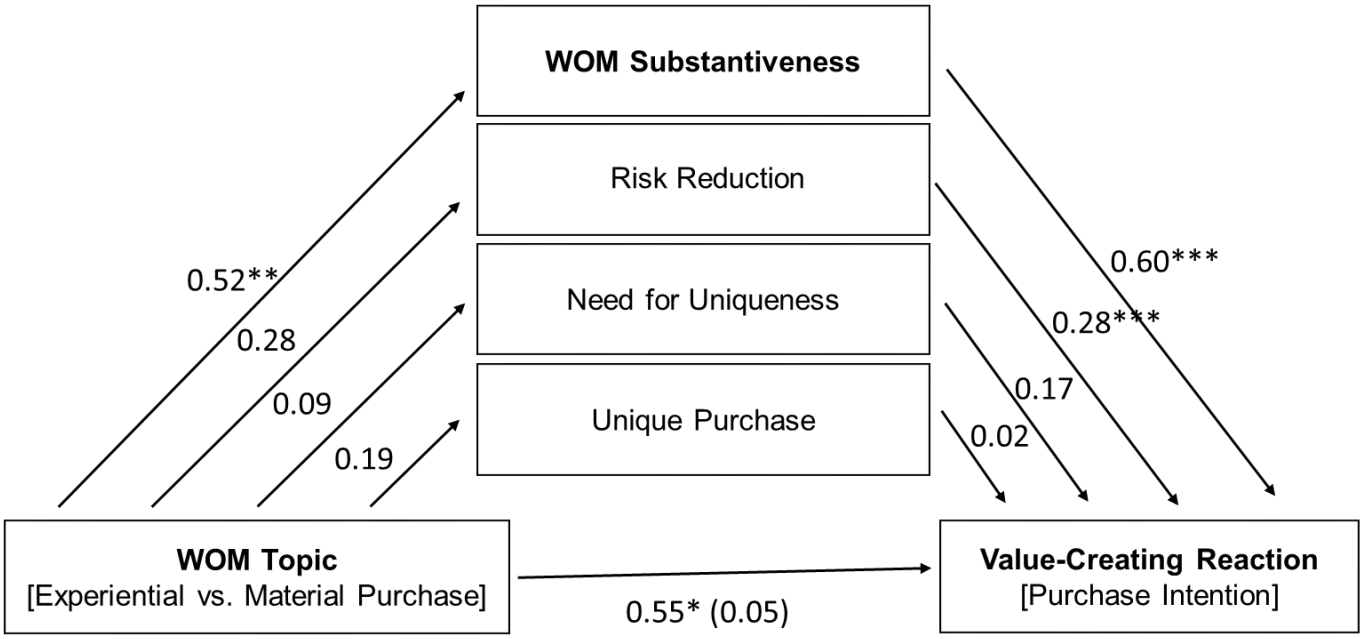


Figure 2. Mediation Model—Results of Study 1



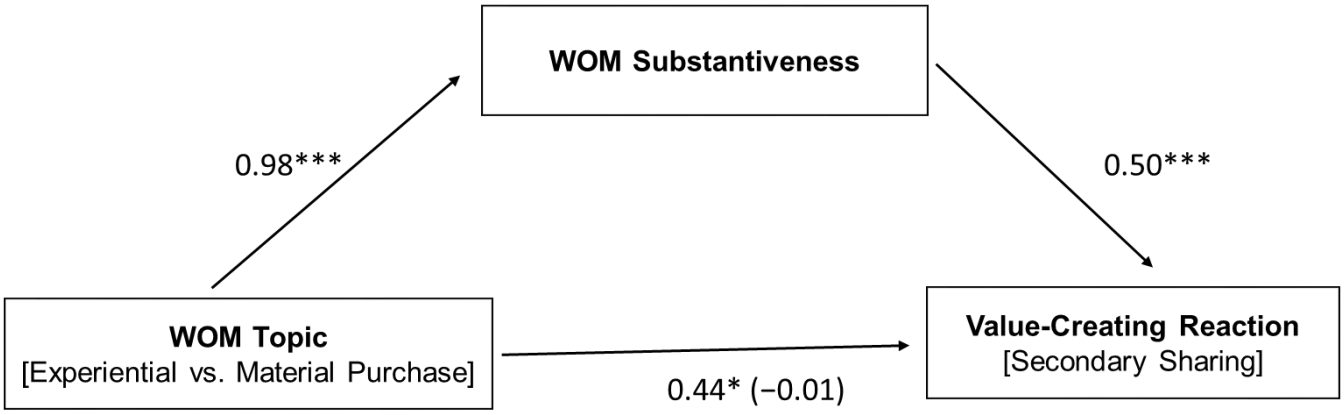
Indirect Effect via WOM Substantiveness: *b* = 0.37, *SE* = 0.17, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.78]

Figure 3. Parallel Multiple Mediator Mediation Model—Results of Study 2



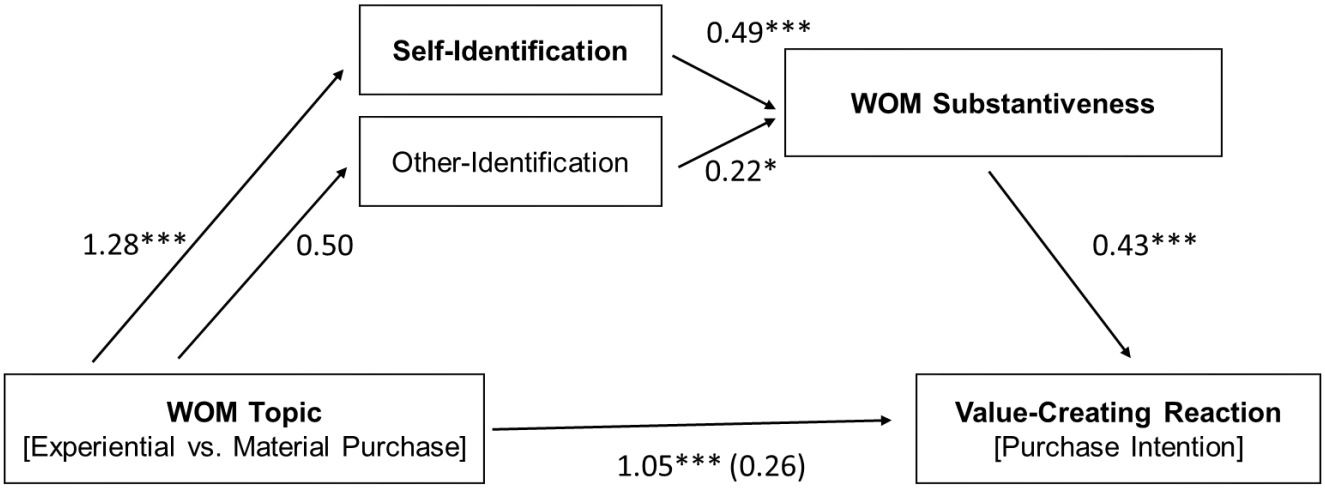
Indirect Effect via WOM Substantiveness: *b* = 0.31, *SE* = 0.12, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.56]
Indirect Effect via Risk Reduction: *b* = 0.08, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI = [-0.06, 0.25]
Indirect Effect via Need for Uniqueness: *b* = 0.02, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [-0.08, 0.09]
Indirect Effect via Unique Purchase: *b* = 0.004, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI = [-0.09, 0.56]

Figure 4. Mediation Model—Results of Study 3



Indirect Effect via WOM Substantiveness: *b* = 0.45, *SE* = 0.11, 95% CI = [0.24, 0.70]

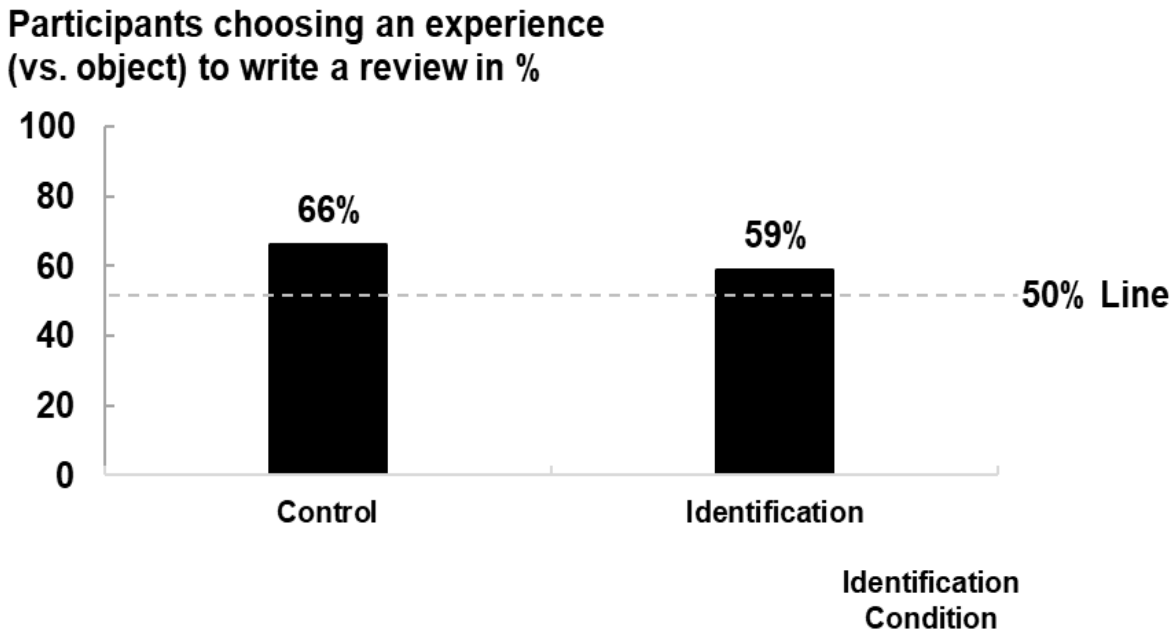
Figure 5. Sequential Mediation Model—Results of Study 4



Indirect Effect via 'self-identification → WOM substantiveness': *b* = 0.27, *SE* = 0.10, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.51]

Indirect Effect via 'other-identification → WOM substantiveness': *b* = 0.04, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [−0.01, 0.16]

Figure 6. Likelihood of Choosing an Experience to Write a Review—Results of Study 5



Web Appendix A—Study 1

List of Measurement Items

WOM Substantiveness (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*; $r = .35$, $p < .001$)

1. The topic that the other person told me about was involving

2. The other person told me meaningful information

Information Acquisition (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 7 = *Strongly Agree*; $\alpha = .77$)

1. I am interested in searching for information about this type of experience/object

2. I want to learn more about experiences/objects like this one

3. I would like the firm where this person bought the experience/object to send me information about this type of experience/object

4. I would likely sign up for a monthly email from the firm that sold this experience/object to the other person

Test of Mediation—Reporting of All Links

This section documents the results for all links of the mediation analysis for Study 1 reported in the manuscript text. For concision, the results are presented in bullet-point style.

Outcome variable: Substantiveness

Experiential versus material WOM ($\beta = 0.65$, $SE = 0.26$, $t(93) = 2.45$, $p = .02$, 95% CI = [0.12, 1.17])

Outcome variable: Information acquisition

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.56, *SE* = 0.31, *t*(92) = 1.80, *p* = .07, 95% CI = [−0.05, 1.18])

Substantiveness (β = 0.58, *SE* = 0.11, *t*(92) = 4.90, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [0.34, 0.81])

Indirect effect

Substantiveness (β = 0.37, *SE* = 0.17, 95% CI = [0.08, 0.78])

Analyses Accounting for Acquaintanceship

These analyses examine the direct and indirect effects in Study 1 controlling for acquaintanceship. All results replicate those reported on the manuscript.

Information acquisition. An ANCOVA using WOM topic to predict interest in acquiring more information about the purchase, with acquaintanceship as a covariate, showed a significant effect of acquaintanceship (*F*(1, 92) = 4.86, *p* = .03). More important, as predicted, participants reported greater interest in acquiring more information when they had engaged in WOM about an experiential (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 1.78), rather than a material purchase (*M* = 2.70, *SD* = 1.46, *F*(1, 92) = 10.62, *p* < .01, Cohen's *d* = 0.06).

Substantiveness mediation. We conducted a bootstrap analysis (PROCESS, model 4; 10,000 resamples; Hayes 2013) to test whether substantiveness mediated the effect of WOM topic on information acquisition. We used WOM topic as the independent variable, substantiveness as the mediator, information acquisition as the dependent variable, and acquaintanceship as a covariate. First, WOM topic (0 = material; 1 = experiential) significantly and positively influenced substantiveness (*b* = 0.70, *SE* = 0.27, *t*(92) = 2.58, *p* = .01); acquaintanceship did not (*b* = 0.06, *SE* = 0.07, *t*(92) = 0.88, *p* = .38). Second, substantiveness (*b* = 0.55, *SE* = 0.11, *t*(91) = 4.77, *p* < .001), and acquaintanceship (*b* = 0.15, *SE* = 0.07, *t*(91) = 2.00, *p* = .05) significantly affected

information acquisition. When substantiveness was included in the model, the effect of WOM topic on information acquisition was attenuated but remained significant (b = 0.71, SE = 0.31, $t(91) = 2.25$, p = .03). More critically, the indirect effect of WOM topic on information acquisition via substantiveness was significant (b = 0.39, SE = 0.17, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.79]).

Additional Statistics

This section reports summary statistics showing the overall mean values for each variable and their inter-correlations for Study 1. Further, it reports mean and standard deviation values of the outcome variables by WOM topic (experiential versus material).

Table A1

Means and Standard Deviations of Outcome Variables by WOM Topic (Experiential vs. Material)—Study 1.

	Experiential WOM		Material WOM	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
WOM Substantiveness*	5.26	1.13	4.61	1.45
Information Acquisition **	3.64	1.78	2.70	1.46

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table A2

Summary Statistics Data—Study 1.

				Correlations		
Labels	Variables	*M*	*SD*	X	M	Y
X	WOM Topic	0.53	0.50	--		
M	WOM Substantiveness	4.95	1.32	.25	(.35)	
Y	Information Acquisition	3.20	1.70	.28	.49	(.77)

Note. $N = 95$. WOM topic (X) was coded as 1 = Experiential ($n = 50$), 0 = Material ($n = 45$). WOM substantiveness consists of the average of two 7-point items. Information acquisition consists of the average of four 7-point items. Reliability values on the diagonal (r or α, as appropriate).

Web Appendix B—Study 2

List of Measurement Items

Purchase Intention (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; α = .90)

1. In the future, I will likely purchase experiences/objects similar to that person's

2. In the future, I am interested in having experiences/objects like the ones the other person told me about

3. I am enthusiastic about having experiences/objects similar to that person's sometime in the future

Risk Reduction (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; α = .88).

1. To me, the conversation with that person helped lower the risks associated with those types of experiences/objects

2. As a result of that conversation, I am now less concerned about the risks associated with experiences/objects like those

3. Following that conversation, I am now less worried about those types of experiences/objects

Purchase Uniqueness (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; α = .88)

1. That person's experiences/objects are unique

2. Those experiences/objects are different from others I that I know about

3. Those experiences/objects are distinct

Need for Uniqueness (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; α = .74)

1. When I am in a group of strangers, I am not reluctant to express my opinion publicly.

2. I find that criticism affects my self-esteem. (r)

3. I sometimes hesitate to use my own ideas for fear they might be impractical. (r)

4. I think society should let reason lead it to new customs and throw aside old habits or mere traditions.

5. People frequently succeed in changing my mind. (r)

6. I find it sometimes amusing to upset the dignity of teachers, judges, and "cultured" people.

7. I like wearing a uniform because it makes me proud to be a member of the organization it represents. (r)

8. People have sometimes called me "stuck-up."

9. Others' disagreements make me uncomfortable. (r)

10. I do not always need to live by the rules and standards of society.

11. I am unable to express my feelings if they result in undesirable consequences. (r)

12. Being a success in one's career means making a contribution that no one else has made.

13. It bothers me if people think I am being too unconventional. (r)

14. I always try to follow rules. (r)

15. If I disagree with a superior on his or her views, I usually do not keep it to myself.

16. I speak up in meetings in order to oppose those whom I feel are wrong.

17. Feeling "different" in a crowd of people makes me feel uncomfortable. (r)

18. If I must die, let it be an unusual death rather than an ordinary death in bed.

19. I would rather be just like everyone else than be called a "freak." (r)

20. I must admit I find it hard to work under strict rules and regulations.

21. I would rather be known for always trying new ideas than for employing well-trusted methods.

22. It is better always to agree with the opinions of others than to be considered a disagreeable person. (r)

23. I do not like to say unusual things to people. (r)

24. I tend to express my opinions publicly, regardless of what others say.

25. As a rule, I strongly defend my own opinions.

26. I do not like to go my own way. (r)

27. When I am with a group of people, I agree with their ideas so that no arguments will arise. (r)

28. I tend to keep quiet in the presence of persons of higher rank, experience, etc. (r)

29. I have been quite independent and free from family rule.

30. Whenever I take part in group activities, I am somewhat of a nonconformist.

31. In most things in life, I believe in playing it safe rather than taking a gamble. (r)

32. It is better to break rules than always to conform with an impersonal society.

Test of Mediation—Reporting of All Links

This section documents the results for all links of the parallel multiple mediation analysis for Study 2 reported in the manuscript text.

Outcome variable: Substantiveness

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.52, *SE* = 0.10, *t*(148) = 2.66, *p* = .009, 95% CI = [0.12, 0.90])

Outcome variable: Risk reduction

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.28, *SE* = 0.29, *t*(148) = 1.14, *p* = .26, 95% CI = [−0.21, 0.77])

Outcome variable: Need for uniqueness

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.08, *SE* = 0.09, *t*(148) = 1.16, *p* = .25, 95% CI = [−0.06, 0.25])

Outcome variable: Purchase uniqueness

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.19, *SE* = 0.25, *t*(148) = 0.75, *p* = .45, 95% CI = [−0.31, 0.69])

Outcome variable: Purchase intention

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.05, *SE* = 0.20, *t*(144) = 0.25, *p* = .80, 95% CI = [−0.34, 0.44])

Substantiveness (β = 0.61, *SE* = 0.09, *t*(144) = 6.79, *p* < .001 , 95% CI = [0.42, 0.78])

Risk reduction (β = 0.28, *SE* = 0.07, *t*(144) = 3.96, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [0.14, 0.42])

Need for uniqueness (β = 0.17, *SE* = 0.19, *t*(144) = 0.89, *p* = .38, 95% CI = [−0.21, 0.55])

Purchase uniqueness (β = 0.02, *SE* = 0.07, *t*(144) = 0.32, *p* = .75, 95% CI = [−0.11, 0.16])

Indirect effects

Substantiveness (β = 0.31, *SE* = 0.12, 95% CI = [0.09, 0.56])

Risk reduction (β = 0.08, *SE* = 0.08, 95% CI = [−0.06, 0.25])

Need for uniqueness (β = 0.02, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [−0.08, 0.09])

Purchase uniqueness (0.004, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI = [−0.09, 0.56])

Additional Statistics

This section reports summary statistics showing the overall mean values for each variable and their inter-correlations for Study 2. Further, it reports mean and standard deviation values of the outcome variables by WOM topic (experiential versus material).

Table B1

Means and Standard Deviations of Outcome Variables by WOM Topic (Experiential vs. Material)—Study 2.

	Experiential WOM		Material WOM	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
WOM Substantiveness**	5.68	0.86	5.09	1.49
Information Acquisition *	5.40	1.47	4.85	1.63

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table B2

Summary Statistics Data—Study 2.

				Correlations		
Labels	Variables	*M*	*SD*	X	M	Y
X	WOM Topic	0.51	0.50	--		
M	WOM Substantiveness	5.39	1.24	.24	(.72)	
Y	Purchase Intention	5.13	1.57	.18	.59	(.90)

Note. *N* = 150. WOM topic (X) was coded as 1 = Experiential (*n* = 76), 0 = Material (*n* = 74). WOM substantiveness consists of the average of two 7-point items. Purchase intention consists of the average of three 7-point items. Reliability values on the diagonal (*r* or α, as appropriate).

Web Appendix C—Study 3

Additional Study Texts

This section reports additional conversation texts that participants in Study 3 received following the ones reported on the manuscript.

Experiential Condition: Definitely. This was one of the best experiences I've had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to experience, you know? I think about it often, I have lots of good memories.

Material Condition: Definitely. This is one of the best objects I've had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to have, you know? I use it often, it has lots of good features.

List of Measurement Items

Sharing WOM information with others (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $r = .75$, $p < .001$)

1. I am likely to tell other people about this experience/object
2. In my conversations with other people I'm likely to talk about the experience/object this person told me about

Test of Mediation—Reporting of All Links

This section documents the results for all links of the parallel multiple mediation analysis for Study 3 reported in the manuscript text.

Outcome variable: Substantiveness

Experiential versus material WOM ($\beta = 0.89$, $SE = 0.20$, $t(201) = 4.33$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.48, 1.29])

Outcome variable: Sharing

Experiential versus material WOM (β = = −0.01, *SE* = 0.18, *t*(200) = −0.04, *p* = .96, 95% CI = [−0.37, 0.35])

Substantiveness (β = 0.50, *SE* = 0.06, *t*(200) = 8.41, *p* < .001, 95% CI = [0.38, 0.62])

Indirect effect

Substantiveness (β = 0.45, *SE* = 0.11, 95% CI = [0.24, 0.70])

Additional Statistics

This section reports summary statistics showing the overall mean values for each variable and their inter-correlations for Study 3. Further, it reports mean and standard deviation values of the outcome variables by WOM topic (experiential versus material).

Table C1

Means and Standard Deviations of Outcome Variables by WOM Topic (Experiential vs. Material)—Study 3.

	Experiential WOM		Material WOM	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
WOM Substantiveness	4.17	1.40	3.28	1.51
Sharing *	2.90	1.43	2.46	1.46

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001.

Table C2

Summary Statistics Data—Study 3.

Labels	Variables	*M*	*SD*	Correlations X	M	Y
X	WOM Topic	0.49	0.50	--		
M	WOM Substantiveness	3.72	1.52	.29	(.64)	
Y	Sharing	2.67	1.46	.15	.53	(.75)

Note. *N* = 203. WOM topic (X) was coded as 1 = Experiential (*n* = 99), 0 = Material (*n* = 104). WOM substantiveness consists of the average of two 7-point items. Sharing consists of the average of two 7-point items. Reliability values on the diagonal (*r*).

Web Appendix D—Study 4

Additional Study Texts

This section reports additional conversation texts that participants in Study 4 received following the ones reported on the manuscript.

Experiential Condition: Definitely! This grill gives me some of the best outdoor experiences I have ever had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to experience, you know? It's all about having good moments around the grill. That's what matters, isn't it?

Anyway, I like it a lot. I have lots of great moments with it. If you are looking for a great experience in the outdoors, I definitely recommend a grill like this. It's a wonderful experience to have!

Material Condition: Definitely! This grill is one of the best outdoor objects I have ever had. It's just the type of thing that you're glad to own, you know? It's all about having good features around the grill. That's what matters, isn't it?

Anyway, I like it a lot. It has lots of great features. If you are looking for a great object for the outdoors, I definitely recommend a grill like this. It's a wonderful object to own!

List of Measurement Items

Self-identification (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .93$)

1. To some extent, this experience/object is related to me
2. This experience/object reflects who I am as a person
3. I can imagine this experience/object as part of me
4. I identify with this person's experience/object

Other-identification (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; α =. 90)

1. To some extent, this experience/object is related to the other person

2. This experience/object reflects who s/he is as a person

3. I can imagine this experience/object as part of her/him

4. The other person identifies with their experience/object

Test of Mediation—Reporting of All Links

This section documents the results for all links of the sequential mediation analysis for Study 4 reported in the manuscript text.

Outcome variable: Self-identification

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 1.28, *SE* = 0.30, $t(93) = 4.17$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.67, 1.89])

Outcome variable: Other-identification

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.50, *SE* = 0.20, $t(93) = 1.70$, $p = .09$, 95% CI = [−0.08, 1.10])

Outcome variable: Substantiveness

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.19, *SE* = 0.29, $t(91) = 0.65$, $p = .52$, 95% CI = [−0.39, 0.78])

Self-identification (β = 0.49, *SE* = 0.09, $t(91) = 5.49$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.31, 0.67])

Other-identification (β = 0.22, *SE* = 0.09, $t(91) = 2.34$, $p = .02$, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.40])

Outcome variable: Purchase intention

Experiential versus material WOM (β = 0.26, *SE* = 0.26, $t(90) = 1.00$, $p = .32$, 95% CI = [−0.25, 0.78])

Self-identification (β = 0.39, *SE* = 0.09, $t(90) = 4.29$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.21, 0.58])

Other-identification ($\beta = -0.06$, *SE* = 0.08, $t(90) = -0.78$, $p = .43$, 95% CI = [−0.23, 0.10])

Substantiveness (β = 0.43, *SE* = 0.09, $t(90) = 4.64$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [0.24, 0.61])

Indirect effects

Self-identification (β = 0.51, *SE* = 0.17, 95% CI = [0.21, 0.87])

Other-identification ($\beta = -0.03$, *SE* = 0.05, 95% CI = [−0.17, 0.04])

Substantiveness (β = 0.08, *SE* = 0.14, 95% CI = [−0.18, 0.37])

Self-identification → Substantiveness (β = 0.27, *SE* = 0.10, 95% CI = [0.10, 0.51])

Other-identification → Substantiveness (β = 0.04, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI = [−0.01, 0.16])

Additional Statistics

This section reports summary statistics showing the overall mean values for each variable and their inter-correlations for Study 4. Further, it reports mean and standard deviation values of the outcome variables by WOM topic (experiential versus material).

Table D1

Means and Standard Deviations of Outcome Variables by WOM Topic (Experiential vs. Material)—Study 4.

	Experiential WOM		Material WOM	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Self-Identification***	4.08	1.54	2.80	1.45
Other-Identification	5.33	1.47	4.82	1.43
WOM Substantiveness**	4.099	1.65	3.15	1.41
Purchase Intention **	3.95	1.64	2.80	1.49

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table D2

Summary Statistics Data—Replication Study 4.

				Correlations				
Labels	Variables	*M*	*SD*	X	M1a	M1b	M2	Y
X	WOM Topic (Experiential vs. Material)	0.51	0.50	--				
M1a	Self-Identification	3.45	1.63	.40	(.93)			
M1b	Other-Identification	5.09	1.45	.17	.11	(.90)		
M2	WOM Substantiveness	3.63	1.60	.30	.55	.27	(.64)	
Y	Purchase Intention	3.38	1.67	.35	.64	.11	.64	(.90)

Note. $N = 95$. WOM topic (X) was coded as 1 = Experiential ($n = 48$), 0 = Material ($n = 47$). Self-identification and other-identification each consists of the average of four 7-item items. WOM substantiveness consists of the average of two 7-point items. Purchase Intention consists of the average of three 7-point items. Reliability values on the diagonal (r or α, as appropriate).

Web Appendix E–Single-Paper Meta-Analysis

We conducted a single-paper meta-analysis (SPMA; McShane & Böckenholt, 2017) across the data to provide a synthesized view of the effect of WOM topic on value-creating reactions as captured by Studies 1-4.

Across these four studies, WOM topic (experiential vs. material) had a significant impact on value-creating reaction. An SPMA of these data estimated the effect at .70 (95% CI = [0.38, 1.02]), indicating that consumers are more likely react in value-creating ways following WOM about an experience (vs. object). I^2 was estimated at 97.50% (95% CI = [96.32, 98.31]), suggesting that heterogeneity is high, with method factors accounting for a moderate variation in the observed effect beyond that attributable to the experimental treatment. This is expected given that the studies employed different manipulation procedures among considerably distinct sample populations and types of value-creating reactions (McShane & Böckenholt, 2017). The visual convergence of effects demonstrated in Figure E1 is particularly encouraging, as it indicates the robustness and generalizability of the findings.

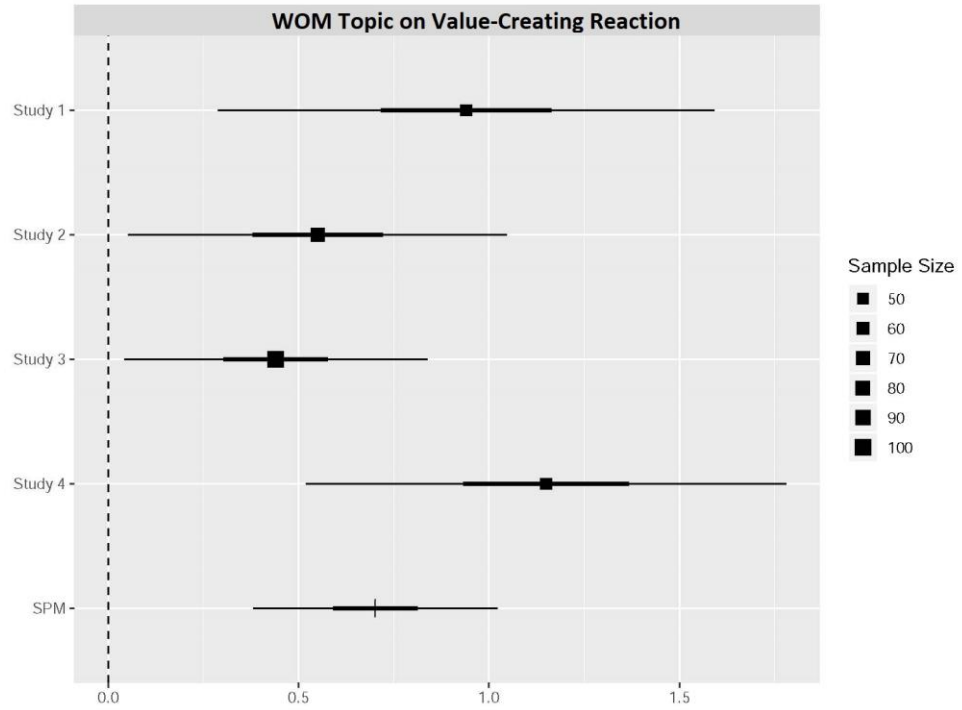


Figure E1. Meta-Analysis Results for Studies 1-4

Table E1

Statistics from the 4 Studies Used in the SPMA

WOM Topic	Experiential			Material		
Study	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*
Study 1	3.64	1.78	50	2.70	1.46	45
Study 2	5.40	1.47	76	4.85	1.63	74
Study 3	2.89	1.43	99	2.45	1.46	104
Study 4	3.95	1.64	48	2.80	1.49	47

SPM Tool Used for This Analysis: https://blakemcshane.shinyapps.io/spmeta/ (McShane & Böckenholt, 2017)