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The Effects of Perceived Traits on Decision-Making and Advice-Taking Behaviors

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Abstract

This study focused on the effect of informants' perceived traits on individuals' decision-making and advice-seeking behaviors. It was hypothesized that the higher source expertise, source likability, and source identifiability, the more value individuals would attribute to the sources' opinions. Moreover, individuals with higher self-efficacy were predicted to attribute less value to informants' claims. Although individuals' self-efficacy level and informants' expertise did not significantly influence the decision-making process, we found that the value rating of sources' opinions correlated with source likability and source identifiability.

Introduction

People often turn to the opinions and advice of others as a way to make decisions more easily and avoid cognitive overload (Litkowski & Renken, 2013). With the increasing presence of celebrities on social media and the use of social platforms for selling products, it's not surprising that celebrity marketing and branding are so common. This makes it important to study whether highly knowledgeable individuals, such as celebrities and industry experts, influence how people make decisions. This could provide valuable insights for businesses and marketing professionals into how people trust and make choices. It was predicted that individuals would place more value on the claims of informants who are seen as more knowledgeable, likable, and relatable. Additionally, it was expected that people with high self-efficacy would place less value on informants' claims, regardless of their characteristics.

Method

Participants

Fifty-nine participants (49 females, 9 males, and 1 nonbinary individual).

Materials

We designed a survey containing eight scenarios. Each scenario contained seven questions relating to the perceived value of opinion, likability, identifiability, and decision-making on a 5-point Likert scale. We also administered the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), with Cronbach's α = .76.

Procedure

Before reading the scenarios and answering questions, participants were given the instructions that their opinions on certain situations would be collected, and they chose whether to give consent to participate. Participants read each scenario, answered the questions, filled out the GSE scale, and reported their demographics before being debriefed.

Results

Experts: There was a moderate positive correlation between the average value rating of experts' opinions and the likability of the experts, $r(57) = .50$, $p<.001$. There was a weak positive correlation between the average value rating of experts' opinions and the identifiability of the experts, $r(57) = .36$, $p=.005$.

Non-Experts: There was a moderate positive correlation between the average value rating of non-expert's opinions and the likability of the non-experts, $r(57) = .54$, $p<.001$. There was a strong positive correlation between the average value rating of non-experts' opinions and the identifiability of the non-experts, $r(57) = .60$, $p<.001$.

Self-efficacy: There was no significant relationship between individuals' general self-efficacy and the average value rating of experts' opinions, $r(57) = -.04$, $p=.772$, and non-experts' opinions, $r(57) = .21$, $p=.109$.

Table 1

	Expert Value	Expert Likability	Expert Identifiability	Total GSE
Expert Value	-	**.50****	**.36****	-.04
Expert Likability		-	**.31***	.34**
Expert Identifiability			-	-.13
Total GSE				-

Note. Total GSE = General Self-efficacy Scale; * $p< .05$l, ** $p<.01$.

Table 2

	Non-Expert Value	Non-Expert Likability	Non-Expert Identifiability	Total GSE
Non-Expert Value	-	**.54****	**.60****	.21
Non-Expert Likability		-	**.68****	.28*
Non-Expert Identifiability			-	.08
Total GSE				-

Note. Total GSE = General Self-efficacy Scale; * $p< .05$l, ** $p<.01$.

	Informant Group	
	Expert	**Non-Expert**
Real World (4)	Michael Jordan Elon Musk Gordon Ramsay Anna Wintour	Teammate Parents Food Buddy Best Friend
Conceptual (4)	Doctor Personal Trainer Certified Financial Planner (CFP) Famous Violinist	Family member Roommate Uber Driver Concierge

Discussion

This study took a situational approach to investigate how the perceived traits of the informant influence an individual's evaluation and endorsement of the informant's advice. Contrary to the hypothesis, **source expertise** did not significantly correlate with individuals' valuation of source opinion. These findings challenge prevailing assumptions about the synergistic effects of source expertise and endorsement, suggesting that the perceived authority or expertise of a source does not necessarily translate into a more favorable reception of their endorsed opinions. One plausible explanation lies in the deliberate choice of 'real-world' celebrity experts featured in the study. By intentionally selecting a mix of controversial celebrity figures, the study aimed to mirror the diverse range of perspectives and public reactions that these individuals elicit. Participants may be relying on their pre-existing impressions of the selected celebrities to guide their evaluation and decisions instead of purely using contextual cues provided by the scenario.

As predicted, **source likeability and identifiability** did positively correlate with individuals' valuation and endorsement decisions. Individuals assigned greater value to opinions provided by those whom they find likable and those who exhibit greater similarities with themselves.

Unlike our prediction, **self-efficacy** did not have a significant relationship with individuals' valuation of informants' opinions. It could be the case that the majority of the sample had high self-efficacy scores (GSE>25) and there was not enough data from low self-efficacy individuals to extrapolate potential differences in outcomes between individuals with high and low self-efficacy. To mitigate this sampling bias and enhance generalizability, future research could address this limitation by recruiting a more diverse participant pool.

The ways in which individuals selectively filter information and sources that they deem valuable are becoming increasingly important to understand in a world of increasing misinformation (Cook & Lewandowsky, 2015). By conducting this study on expertise and source rating, we contributed to understanding what could potentially underlie consumer decision-making and advice-taking in terms of sources' traits. Based on this analysis, the opinions of individuals who are more liked and able to be more relatable (based on identifiability) may obtain higher value ratings from that individual's audience.

Sample Scenario

Restaurant Decision: Imagine you were perusing your most used social media application and came across Gordon Ramsay's new food review for a restaurant in your area. The review for restaurant A caught your eye, as you have never visited this restaurant before. Gordon Ramsay's review was very positive, and he recommended locals to visit this restaurant. You made a note of this and planned to visit the restaurant in the near future. You shared your idea to visit this restaurant with your food buddy, then they told you that they visited this restaurant in the past and did not have the best experience and were not necessarily inclined to return to restaurant A.

【Gordon Ramsay is a global chef and restaurateur best known for his competitive cooking television shows.】

【Your food buddy is a friend of yours who you frequently visit new restaurants with and share a love of cuisine.】