

Bringing Us Together or Driving Us Apart: The Effect of Soliciting Consumer Input on
Consumers' Propensity to Transact with an Organization

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This research examines a novel process by which soliciting consumer input can impact subsequent purchase and engagement, namely, by changing consumers' subjective perception of their relationship with the organization. We contrast different types of consumer input and propose that, relative to no input, soliciting advice tends to have an intimacy effect whereby the individual feels closer to the organization, resulting in increases in subsequent propensity to transact and engage with the organization. On the other hand, soliciting expectations tends to have the opposite effect, distancing the individual from the organization. We demonstrate these relationship effects of consumer input in four studies involving both non-profit and for-profit organizations. Implications for theory and practice of brand relationship as well as consumer judgment and decision making is discussed.

Marketers and non-profit organizations alike regularly solicit input from customers or donors for myriad reasons, most notably to measure consumers' preferences, expectations and satisfaction. Further, organizations welcome comments and suggestions from customers in order to better serve their needs. The rise of interactive social media such as Facebook and Twitter are expected to provide even greater opportunities for marketers to interact with customers and solicit their input (Treadway and Smith 2010).

Nevertheless, despite the pervasiveness of consumer input as a component of organizations' managerial decisions, extant research on the effect of soliciting input on consumer behavior is still limited to a few (albeit significant) streams of findings (e.g., Chandon, Morwitz, and Reinartz 2004; Dholakia and Morwitz 2002; Levav and Fitzsimons 2006; Liu and Aaker 2008; Ofir and Simonson 2007). In particular, research has tended to focus on the measure of purchase intentions and satisfaction, and the role of judgment accessibility and valence in those measures. However, we conjecture that soliciting input may give rise to a broader set of factors at play. Of particular importance, soliciting input creates a social interaction between the company and the customer. An interesting question thereby arises: how might such an interaction affect the relationship between the customer and the company, particularly as perceived by the customer? And how might a change in the perceived relationship translate to eventual purchase?

In the present research, we propose that soliciting different forms of consumer input can have differential effects on the nature of the customers' relationship with the organization and subsequent purchase. Specifically, we focus our examination on three types of inputs frequently solicited by organizations from customers, namely, advice, opinions, and expectations, and propose that compared to other forms of inputs, advice has a unique intimacy effect whereby giving advice makes the customer feel closer to the organization, resulting in greater likelihood

of future purchase. In contrast, stating expectations tends to have a distancing effect. We test our hypothesis in a series of four experiments involving both real and hypothetical transactions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Several interesting streams of findings exist with regards to the effect of soliciting consumer input on subsequent behavior, including, for example, the “mere measurement effect” (Nedungadi 1990; Feldman and Lynch 1988; Fitzsimons and Morwitz 1996; Chandon et al. 2004; Fitzsimons and Williams 2000; Fitzsimons and Shiv 2001; Janiszewski and Chandon 2007; Levav and Fitzsimons 2006; Morwitz and Fitzsimons 2004; Morwitz, Johnson, and Schmittlein 1993; Williams, Fitzsimons, and Block 2004; Dholakia and Morwitz 2002), the “expect to evaluate effect” (Ofir and Simonson 2007; Ofir and Simonson 2001; Ofir, Simonson, and Yoon 2009), and the “time-ask effect” (Liu and Aaker 2008). Although these effects are quite distinct from each other, the broader theoretical perspective they share in common is the activation of existing knowledge structures in the construction of answers to questions. Specifically, providing input can activate existing attitudes (Fitzsimons and Morwitz 1996), imagery about a behavior (Levav and Fitzsimons 2006), social roles and schemas (Ofir and Simonson 2007), or knowledge and emotions associated with certain constructs such as time and money (Liu and Aaker 2008). Because of the activation of specific thoughts and knowledge structures, research shows that answering questions does not merely provide an input; instead, it can also affect a person’s subsequent behaviors in manners consistent with the activated constructs.

Extending this notion, in this research, we propose another dimension to the effect of soliciting customer input; namely, soliciting input can impact the relationship between the customer and the organization, as construed by the customer, by activating thoughts with relationship implications. Specifically, we focus on a particularly interesting type of input from customers, namely, advice and suggestions, and explore its relationship implications and downstream effects. Next, we draw on theories of social relationships, particularly theories of relationship closeness, and research on advice giving to develop our hypotheses.

Social Relationship and Relationship Closeness

Much of a person's daily activities occur in the context of social relationships, that is, in interacting with others directly or indirectly. When people interact, their relationships take on various forms. In their seminal work, Clark and Mills distinguished between communal and exchange relationships (Clark and Mills 1979, 1993). Communal relationships are defined as a type of relationship in which members feel a special sense of responsibility for the other party's welfare as if it were one's own, and consider their identities to be closely related (Clark, Fitness, and Brissette 2001). Prototypical communal relationships include friendships, romantic relationships and family relationships. Typically construed as the opposite of communal relationships, exchange relationships refer to interactions in which benefits are exchanged between the parties with expectations of remuneration of equivalent amounts. Prototypical cases include the relationship between a store owner and a customer, and acquaintances who help each other with tasks, such as parents who arrange a carpool to their children's soccer practices.

People in exchange relationships are relatively independent as one person considers his/her interests and identity as strictly separate from that of the other.

Of note, although it is useful to have pure theoretical prototypes for communal and exchange relationships, in this paper we take on the view that, in reality, a given relationship may be a mix of both, located somewhere on a continuum of emphasis from one type of relationship to the other. For example, for a specific store owner and a specific customer, even though their relationship is predominantly defined by an economic exchange, they may also have a sense of communal bonding due to the fact that, say, they share a common hometown, or a similar hobby. As such, even though most of their transactions will be based on market economics, it is also possible that within certain latitudes, the customer will be more likely to patronize this store rather than another (even though the economic benefits are the same), and the store owner may genuinely care (to a certain extent) about the customer's wellbeing when he greets him/her with a cordial "how are you?"

A closely related concept in relationship theory is closeness (Aron et al. 1991). Closeness is often treated as implicitly referring to the communal aspect of a relationship (Clark et al. 2001). For example, to measure the degree to which a person has a communal relationship with another, researchers may simply ask "how close are you to this person?" (Barrett et al. 1998). Thus the construct of closeness is typically used to refer to the degree of communal bonding, rather than the degree of interaction or dependence per se. For example, a business and a customer can have frequent interactions and rely on each other heavily for mutual benefit. However, if both parties keep their interests and identity strictly separate from one another, then although they might have a tight business relationship, they will not feel "close" to each other, in

the sense of selfless caring. Thus communal relationship and “feeling close” both refer to a subjective sense of merging of the self and the other’s identity and interests.

Consistent with this conceptualization, Aron and Aron (1986) proposed that this subjective sense of closeness is best captured by a Venn-like diagram (Other in the Self (IOS) scale; Aron, Aron, and Smollan 1992) to describe the degree of overlapping selves. The IOS has been shown in a substantial body of previous research as a good measure of subjective closeness. Specifically, the IOS has been shown to have high test-retest reliability, discriminant validity, and convergent validity with other measures of closeness (Aron et al., 1992). Further, the measure has shown good predictive validity for relationship endurance and satisfaction (Aron et al. 1992), helping others (Cialdini et al. 1997), and multiple other outcomes (for review, see Agnew et al. 2004). The closer the relationship, the greater the extent the person will include the other in the self (Slotter and Gardner 2009). Because this scale is well-validated by previous research, we will use this scale to measure people’s perception of closeness with another party—in this case, with a marketer or non-profit organization. We further propose that an increased subjective closeness with an organization will positively influence the customer’s propensity to subsequently engage with the organization.

Shifting Perceptions of Relationship Closeness

Chronic determinants of relationship closeness notwithstanding, research shows that perceptions of relationship closeness can fluctuate depending on the situational relationship knowledge available (Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010). For example, perceived closeness to another often depends on the behavior of the other party. Research shows that people tend to feel

closer to another when that person is more instrumental towards one's current goal (Fitzsimons and Shah 2008; Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010). Closeness is also found to be fostered by compromises (Impett, Gable, and Peplau 2005) and self control (Vohs, Baumeister, and Ciarocco 2005). All of these behaviors signal a deferral of benefit for the other in the interest of the self, making the other close to the self.

Interestingly, although a person's perceived relationship closeness to another could change based on what the other party has done for the self as demonstrated in the findings above, research shows that the perception of relationship closeness could also change depending on the person's own behavior towards the other. In particular, past research highlights the role of a situationally induced empathetic perspective in fostering closeness to another. For example, Batson et al. (1995) show that when people are induced to think about the similarities between them and another, they are more likely to care about the welfare of the other – a hallmark of relationship closeness. Similarly, after following instructions to take the perspective of another person (also termed "empathic observation"), participants report greater caring for that person, and are more inclined to help this person when she is in need (e.g., Aderman, Brehm, and Katz 1974; Zillman and Cantor 1977; Batson et al. 1995). Conversely, people given instructions to take the perspective of a detached observer while observing a person in need have been shown to derogate that person (Aderman et al., 1974). In general, taking the perspective of another person has been shown to increase perceptions of relationship closeness on the IOS scale (Davis et al. 1996; Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000) and the subjective feelings of care and warmth towards the other (Batson, Early, and Salvarani 1997; Coke, Batson, and McDavis 1978). Thus a bi-directional link exists between empathetic thoughts, and relationship closeness—whereas close

relationships engender empathetic thoughts, having empathetic thoughts also fosters the subjective experience of relationship closeness.

In the present research, we propose that offering advice to another party inherently elicits a thought process that involves taking an empathic perspective towards the advice-recipient. This empathetic perspective taking then leads to a subjective experience of closeness to the organization receiving the advice, resulting in greater likelihood to engage with the organization.

Advice and Relationship Closeness

Advice is often solicited by organizations, whether non-profit or for-profit in nature. For instance, business schools often have advisory boards comprised of well-regarded business leaders and ask alumni to interview and offer recommendations regarding MBA applicants.

By definition, advice involves giving recommendations towards a course of action intended to improve the wellbeing of the advice-recipient. As such, advice is often perceived by the advice-recipient as a form of social support (Cowen 1982; Goldsmith and Fitch 1997; MacGeorge et al. 2004; Reinhardt, Boerner, and Horowitz 2006), where social support is defined as "...an exchange of resources between at least two individuals perceived by the provider or the recipient as intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (Ashton and Fuehrer 1993, p. 462). Further, advice recipients often view the receipt of advice as a signal of a close relationship with the advice giver. For example, a field study of advice exchanges found that independent of the content of advice, "...[advice] was valued for the relational *caring* it expressed" (p. 462, italics in original; Goldsmith and Fitch 1997).

However, thus far little attention has been paid to the effect of advice on the giver of advice. In this research, we propose that compared to other forms of input, advice may be unique because advice-giving inherently induces the giver to take the perspective of the advice recipient. Thus the caring felt by the advice recipient is a natural reflection of the nature of the thought process of the advice giver. Furthermore, these thoughts will affect the advice giver's construal of the relationship as well. We argue that advice giving generates empathetic perspectives for two reasons. First, the task of advice giving requires the person to look at the other person's problem and think of ways to improve it. Thus when giving advice, the person needs to understand the situation facing the other party. In doing so, the person naturally assumes the other party's problems (i.e., mentally puts themselves in the other party's shoes). Second, when giving advice, in addition to understanding the other's situation, one must also try to identify solutions. In doing so, the person also assumes the other party's set of resources and limitations as well as their motivation for success, further placing oneself in the other party's position. In sum, the advice giver tends to naturally think about the other person's problem from the other's perspective, thereby to some extent blurring the line between the self and the other. Consistent with previous research, we conjecture that this empathetic thought process subsequently increases one's feeling of closeness towards the advice recipient (Batson et al., 1997; Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000).

Contrasting Advice to Other Forms of Input

In addition to examining the effect of giving advice versus not giving advice on individuals' subjective closeness to and likelihood of transacting with an organization, we contrast advice to a

couple of other types of inputs frequently solicited by marketers, namely, expectations, and opinions. Doing so can help us rule out a “mere input” effect by demonstrating that the effect on relationship closeness is a function of advice-giving, rather than of any type of input in general.

Although research on the link between expectations and opinions and social relationships is more limited, we nevertheless conjecture that, whereas opinions could be a mix of all kinds of comments and thus is neutral in the aggregate in terms of relationship closeness implications, stating expectations may in fact have the opposite effect as giving advice whereby expectations may reduce the feeling of closeness to the other (assuming the baseline closeness is not zero; otherwise a floor effect may be obtained). We believe there are several possible reasons why this may be the case. Research shows expectations are typically given in superior-subordinate relationships in which the person providing the expectations has some power over the person receiving the expectations, such as in teacher-student (e.g., Facione, Facione, and Giancarlo 1997; Linn 2003) and manager-subordinate (e.g., Schneier, Shaw, and Beatty 1991; Peterson and Emmett 1998) relationships. Prior research shows that adopting a “superior” role increases self focus and decreases perspective taking and caring towards others (Gruenfeld et al. 2008; Galinsky et al. 2006; Rucker, Dubois, and Galinsky 2010). Similar to the organizational context, in a consumer context, stating expectations might place the consumer in a high-status state relative to the marketer (i.e., one that involves a focus on the marketer working for the consumer), thereby diminishing empathetic perspective toward the marketer, and decreasing relationship closeness. In addition, we argue that compared to the organizational context, the specific thoughts elicited by expectations in the consumer context might be even more explicitly self-focused. The reason is that in an employer-employee context, although expectations for employees are mainly crafted in the service of the employer, one might argue that the expressed

focus is on the employee and the employee's performance. On the other hand, in the consumer context, stating expectations for a company explicitly involves defining one's own interests and needs from the product, namely, "what I expect your product to do for me," without any regard for the company's interest. Taken together, we posit that if at baseline the consumer feels a certain amount of closeness to a company, stating expectations can in fact minimize such feelings by actively encouraging a self-focus. Consequently, the consumer's subjective closeness to the marketer is diminished, lowering his/her inclination to transact with the marketer.

Thus based on the above theorizing we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Soliciting advice from a customer tends to result in greater propensity to transact with the organization, compared to when advice is not solicited.

H2: Soliciting expectations from a customer tends to result in less propensity to transact with the organization, compared to when expectations are not solicited.

Additionally, we make the following propositions regarding the mechanism underlying the effect of advice giving (stating expectations) on subsequent engagement.

H3: The change in propensity to transact due to giving advice (stating expectations) is driven at least in part by an increased (decreased) relationship closeness the customer perceives with the organization as a result of providing advice (stating expectations).

H4: The change in perceived relationship distance is due to the inherent thought process of advice-giving (stating expectations), which involves taking an empathic (self-focused) perspective towards the advice-recipient.

Next, we present four experiments to test these hypotheses. In experiments 1 and 2, we will first demonstrate the basic effect that soliciting advice versus expectations from customers will have a differential impact on the customers' subsequent likelihood to transact with the organization. Then in experiments 3 and 4 we focus on demonstrating the psychological mechanism, namely a change in customers' subjective experience of relationship closeness with the organization, underlying the effects of advice versus expectations on transactions.

EXPERIMENT 1

The goal of experiment 1 was to test the hypothesis that advice-giving would lead to an increase in the propensity to transact with an organization. Further, we begin to shed light into the relationship-based nature of the effect of advice.

In particular, we wish to tease apart two types of effects: One, as we proposed, giving advice increases one's closeness to the advice recipient and subsequent engagement with the recipient. On the other hand, an alternative mechanism might be that advice-giving can result in a general "other-focused" mindset. That is, by giving advice, the person is primed to adopt a broad orientation (i.e., mindset) that is more other-focused, and perhaps more generous. However, we argue that when giving advice, the person focuses only on the situation and welfare of the target partner, and hence the empathetic thoughts elicited by advice-giving pertain only to the advice recipient. Consequently, whereas the advice giver feels closer to the advice recipient, he/she does not exhibit greater other-focus, generosity or friendliness in general. Therefore we predict that:

H1a: Advice-giving to one organization will affect only one's propensity to transact with that organization, but will not affect the propensity to engage with other unrelated organizations.

This prediction is consistent with prior research showing that empathy is specific to the individual for whom empathetic thoughts are elicited (Cialdini et al. 1997; see also Dovidio, Allen, and Schroeder 1990).

Method

Experiment 1 had a 2 (Input Form: Advice vs. Control) \times 2 (Input Recipient: Building Hope vs. Preemie Promise) \times 2 (Donation Recipient: Building Hope vs. Preemie Promise) between subject design and was conducted online. Three-hundred-fifty-two (352) participants were recruited from an online pool of individuals from throughout the United States and were randomly assigned to conditions. Participants were rewarded for their participation with a raffle entry to win \$25 and \$50 Amazon gift certificates.

Participants were informed that we, as business school faculty, were working with several young charities to help them in their missions. In the Advice Input conditions, they were informed that one of the charities we were working with was soliciting advice from survey participants, and were asked to read a description of the charity and then provide any advice they might have. In the Control Input conditions, participants were merely asked to read the description of the charity. Participants then read a description of one of two charities, Building

Hope or Preemie Promise, depending on condition. The descriptions for each of the charities read as follows:

Building Hope

Thank you for taking the time to read about our organization. Building Hope was founded in 2007 by Elana Lee, a former battered woman, to help aid other battered women and children.

Family violence is the number one crime and cause of injury to women in the U.S. and is believed to be the most common, yet least reported crime in the country. Building Hope aspires to become a model for the nation by introducing innovative programs at shelters designed to help women and children become more self-sufficient.

Building Hope has established a team of dedicated volunteers that give generously of their time and resources to make a difference in the lives of women and children who have been victims of domestic violence.

Preemie Promise

Thank you for taking the time to read about our organization. Premie Promise was founded in 2007 by Sandra Hansen, a mom of a premature infant, to help improve the care of premature babies.

Every year over 50,000 babies born either prematurely or requiring intensive care are cared for in hospitals throughout the United States. Their care and their survival depends on the skill of doctors, nurses and the developmental team, the high tech equipment and the love and presence of their parents. Premie Promise aims to help ensure that this is available, through helping to provide the support, equipment and training that medical staff, babies and families need.

In the Advice Input conditions, participants were then asked: “We are interested in what advice you might have for our organization?” After entering any advice they had, participants were thanked, “Thank you for your advice to our organization!” Participants in the Control Input condition were also thanked, “Thank you for reading about our organization!”

Depending on condition, participants were then offered the opportunity to donate to the organization they just read about or to a different organization (Building Hope if they had just read about Premie Promise and Premie Promise if they had just read about Building Hope). Participants were informed that if they were selected as a raffle winner to receive an Amazon gift certificate, they could donate up to \$5 of their award to the organization. When the organization was different from the one they had just read about, the description of that organization also

followed. Participants then selected the amount they would be willing to donate from radio buttons labeled \$0 to \$5 in \$1 increments.

Results

A three-way $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVA with willingness to donate (WTD) as dependent variable, and input form, input recipient, and donation recipient as factors revealed a marginal main effect of input form on participants' WTD, with those participants providing advice to the organizations manifesting a marginally higher WTD ($M = 3.04$) than those participants who merely read about the organizations ($M = 2.60$; $F(1,344) = 3.46$, $p = .06$). There was also a significant Input Recipient \times Donation Recipient interaction ($F(1,344) = 4.44$, $p < .05$). No other one-way or two-way predictors were significant (F 's < 1).

Importantly, the one-way and two-way interaction effects were accompanied by a significant three-way Input Form \times Input Recipient \times Donation Recipient interaction ($F(1,344) = 6.72$, $p = .01$). To interpret this interaction, we examine several planned contrasts. We use directional (i.e., one-tailed) tests for these planned contrasts and all other in the article when testing directional hypotheses.

Focusing on those giving input to Preemie Promise, consistent with H1, participants giving advice to Preemie Promise donated more to Preemie Promise ($M = \$3.52$) than participants who merely read about Preemie Promise ($M = \$2.55$; $F(1,89) = 4.38$, $p < .05$, $d = .44$). In contrast, consistent with H1a, participants that gave advice to Preemie Promise did not differ in the amount they donated to Building Hope ($M = \$2.41$) from participants who merely read about Preemie Promise ($M = \$2.79$; $F < 1$).

A similar pattern was observed among participants providing input to Building Hope. In particular, consistent with H1, participants giving advice to Building Hope donated more to Building Hope ($M = \$3.69$) than those that merely read about Building Hope ($M = \$2.53$; $F(1,88) = 6.34$, $p < .01$, $d = .53$). However, consistent with H1a, participants who gave advice to Building Hope did not differ in the amount they donated to Preemie Promise ($M = \$2.55$) from those who merely read about Building Hope ($M = \$2.52$; $F < 1$).

Figure 1

Discussion

Experiment 1 found that in a setting where real money is involved, giving advice to an organization led to subsequently higher donation to that organization, compared to a control condition where no advice was given. Further, consistent with the proposition that the advice effect is specific to the relationship between an advice-giver and advice-recipient rather than an activation of a general tendency for other-focus or generosity, the effect of advice-giving on donations did not extend beyond the advice-recipient.

In experiment 2, we wish to extend the findings of experiment 1 to a for-profit business context. Further, we wish to test H2 by contrasting the effect of giving advice on subsequent engagement to that of stating expectations. Doing so will also allow us to rule out the alternative explanation of a “mere input effect” whereby giving any input might increase the customers’ involvement with the organization and hence subsequent engagements.

EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 2 compares the consumers' input of advice versus that of expectations in a for-profit business setting. We hypothesize that whereas giving advice reduces perceived relationship distance and thus leads to greater propensity to purchase with the advice recipient, stating expectations to a business will have the opposite, distancing effect (H1 and H2), compared to a no-input condition.

Method

Experiment 2 has 3 conditions (advice, expectations, and no-input). One hundred thirty-one (131) participants were recruited from an online subject pool of individuals from throughout the United States and were randomly assigned to conditions. Participants were rewarded for their participation with a raffle entry to win \$25 and \$50 Amazon gift certificates.

Participants were informed that we, as business school faculty, were working with several young businesses. In the advice condition, participants were informed that one of the businesses we were working with, EcoGym, was interested in consumer advice for their service; in the expectations condition, participants were informed that EcoGym was interested in consumer expectations for their service; and in the no-input condition, participants were simply asked to read the description of EcoGym. All participants then read the following description:

EcoGym is a new "green" concept in fitness clubs. Our goal is to develop an ecologically friendly gym from the ground up. We intend to reduce our

energy consumption by building our gym to allow in natural lighting and by using high quality insulation materials to reduce energy consumption from heating and cooling. The materials we intend to use to decorate the gym will include natural woods and fibers. Moreover, the gym will incorporate solar panels for energy generation and fitness equipment, such as treadmills and exercise bikes, will convert members' exercise power into electric power to operate the gym. The gym will also include a cafe featuring all-natural and organic products, such as healthy smoothies and energy bars.

After reading the company description, participants in the advice condition were asked to provide any advice they might have for the company's service whereas participants in the expectations condition were asked to provide any expectations they might have for the company's service. Afterwards, participants were thanked for their input (or for reading the description in the control condition).

Participants were then asked how likely they would be to get a membership to an EcoGym if the price was reasonable, on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 ("not at all likely") to 7 ("extremely likely").

Results

An omnibus one-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of input form on purchase likelihood ($F(2, 128) = 7.62, p < .001$). Planned contrasts using one-tailed tests for directional hypotheses showed that participants in the advice condition expressed a greater likelihood of purchase ($M =$

4.29) than participants in the control condition ($M = 3.60$; $t(84) = 1.78$, $p < .05$, $d = .38$), who in turn expressed a greater likelihood of purchase than participants in the expectations condition ($M = 2.77$; $t(87) = 2.20$, $p < .05$, $d = .47$).

Discussion

Experiment 2 found that providing advice, but not giving expectations, can significantly increase customers' subsequent purchase intent. In fact, giving expectations had the opposite effect of advice, reducing subsequent purchase intent. Thus the positive effect of providing input does not apply to all types of inputs, and advice is one specific type of input that has a positive influence. In the next experiment, we wish to further replicate this finding, and moreover, examine the process by which the positive (negative) effect of advice (expectations) occurs.

EXPERIMENT 3

The main objective of experiment 3 is to provide convergent evidence to experiments 1 and 2, while providing evidence for the proposed underlying process of the advice versus expectations effect. Specifically, we theorized that advice impacts subsequent purchase by creating a subjective feeling of relationship closeness between the customer and the organization. Further, we hypothesized that this closeness ensues due to the inherent thought process of advice-giving, namely, that it directs the advice-giver to take an empathetic perspective of the advice-recipient, thereby creating a subjective merger of the self and other, which is the conceptual underpinning of relationship closeness. Thus in experiment 3, we wish to provide a

formalized test of the following theoretical model (as proposed in H3 and H4, and depicted by figure 3): We propose a two-step mediation whereby the effect of giving input (advice versus other inputs) on subsequent purchase is mediated by a change in subjective closeness to the organization; moreover, the effect of giving input on perceived relationship closeness is mediated by the different perspectives involved in the input thought process.

Figure 3 here.

To provide evidence for this model, in experiment 3 we measure subjective closeness to the organization using the IOS scale (Aron et al. 1991). Further, we conduct a thought coding on the inputs given by participants to the organization to provide evidence for the difference in empathetic perspective taking among different forms of inputs.

Another objective of experiment 3 is to examine several alternative mechanisms for the effect of giving advice versus expectations. For example, one alternative account for the effect of advice giving might be that offering advice tends to focus one's attention on how things could be better, resulting in a focus on the positive aspects of the organization. Conversely, other forms of input, such as expectations, might focus attention on what an organization lacks, leading to a focus on negative aspects of the organization. Another alternative explanation might be that giving advice (but not giving expectations) may be seen by the customer as a small act of help to the organization, and this action leads to a foot-in-the-door effect (Cialdini 1993) such that these customers are then eased into giving a bigger favor subsequently in the form of a purchase or a donation. Yet another possibility is that the organization's solicitation of advice/expectations may lead to different perceptions of the organization. For example, different solicitations may

imply different acknowledgement of power balance between the organization and the customer. In particular, soliciting advice may imply the organization is humble and putting customers at a higher status. On the other hand, perhaps soliciting expectations may signal an air of arrogance from the company (e.g., “we doubt you can expect more”); although one could also argue the opposite that expectations are typically asked by lower-ranks from higher-ranks; Schneier et al. 1991). As a result, people might want to reward the organization they perceive as humble and punish the organization they perceived as arrogant. To address these alternative accounts of the effect of advice versus expectations on subsequent purchase, in experiment 3 we will test for the valence, helpfulness, and brand image implications of giving advice versus expectations.

Finally, in experiment 3 we will use another type of control condition to contrast with the effect of advice and expectations for convergent evidence. Specifically, in experiments 1 and 2 we compared giving advice or expectations to a no-input condition to establish the net positive or negative effect of giving input. In this experiment, we use instead a provision of opinions as the “control” condition. In addition to the practical relevance of collecting open-ended opinions by organizations, using opinions rather than no-input as a baseline will allow us to collect some form of input across all conditions, which can then be analyzed with respect to their various characteristics we wish to examine. As argued earlier, we expect open-ended opinions to be relatively neutral in its effect on relationship closeness and transaction propensity compared to advice and expectations, because opinions can contain many different types of content so that the average effect is relatively neutral.

Method

Experiment 3 manipulated whether participants provided their advice, opinions, or expectations for an organization. Two-hundred-fifty-six (256) participants were recruited from an online pool of individuals from throughout the United States and were randomly assigned to conditions. Participants were rewarded for their participation with a raffle entry to win \$25 and \$50 Amazon gift certificates.

Participants were informed that we, as business school faculty, were working with several young businesses. Participants were informed that one of the businesses we were working with, Splash!, was a new business developing a restaurant concept and was soliciting input from survey participants; they were variably told that the input being solicited by Splash! was any advice, opinions, or expectations they might have for the restaurants (“Splash! is interested in what (advice you might have for them about/opinions you might have about/expectations you might have for) the restaurants”). All participants then read the description, presented in the Appendix.

After reading the company description, participants were asked: “We are interested in any advice/opinions/expectations you might have regarding our restaurants.” Afterwards, participants were thanked for their input.

Next, participants were asked to indicate how close they felt to Splash! using the IOS scale (response range from 1 to 7; see figure 2). In particular, participants were asked to assume that in each pair of circles in the scale, one circle represented themselves and one circle represented Splash!. They were asked to select the pair of circles that most accurately represented how close they felt to Splash!

Figure 2

We then took measures to examine several alternative explanations. Specifically, to examine whether different input modes elicited a difference in focus on the positive versus negative aspects of the organization, we asked participants, “When providing input to Splash! to what extent were you focused on providing input on the positive versus negative aspects of the organization,” rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“Focused entirely on the negative”) to 7 (“Focused entirely on the positive”).

To examine a potential foot-in-the-door effect of giving input, we measured whether participants perceived giving advice, expectations, and opinions differently as small acts of help (two items: “To what extent was your input an act of help to Splash!?” on a 7-point scale ranging from “Not at all” to “A significant act of help”, and “How difficult was it for you to give this input?” on a 7-point scale ranging from “Not at all” to “Very”).

To gauge whether the organization’s solicitation of advice/expectations/opinions leads to different perceptions of the organization, we included two 7-point measures of brand perception: “How humble[arrogant] is Splash!?”

Finally, as a measure of purchase likelihood, participants were asked how likely they would be to try a Splash! restaurant if one were to open in their area on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“not at all likely”) to 7 (“extremely likely”).

Results

We tested the mediational paths from input mode to purchase likelihood following the following strategy: First, we identify the pivotal role of subjective closeness in the effect of

giving advice (versus opinions and expectations). Specifically, we examine (a) the effect of closeness as a mediator to the downstream consequence of purchase likelihood as a result of input, and (b) the upstream determinant of closeness, namely, the inherent difference in empathetic thoughts involved in advice versus other inputs. To this end we conduct two single-step mediation analyses, to focus on each of the input \rightarrow closeness \rightarrow purchase, and the input \rightarrow empathetic perspective \rightarrow closeness processes. Second, we conduct a multi-step mediation analysis (Hayes, Preacher, and Myers 2010) to test the overall process model of input \rightarrow empathetic perspectives \rightarrow closeness \rightarrow purchase.

Purchase Likelihood. As hypothesized, an omnibus one-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of input solicitation mode on purchase likelihood ($F(2,253) = 16.25, p < .001$). Planned contrasts using one-tailed tests for directional hypotheses showed that purchase likelihood was higher in the Advice ($M = 5.74$) than in the Opinions condition ($M = 5.05; t(157) = 2.73, p < .01, d = .43$), and lower in the Expectations ($M = 4.29$) than in the Opinions condition ($M = 5.05; t(171) = 2.86, p < .01, d = .44$).

Subjective Closeness. Correspondingly, an omnibus one-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of input solicitation mode on our measure of relationship closeness, namely the IOS scale ($F(2,253) = 9.81, p < .001$). Planned contrasts using one-tailed tests showed that relationship closeness was greater in the Advice ($M = 3.22$) than in the Opinions condition ($M = 2.59; t(152) = 2.31, p < .05$), and that relationship closeness was lower in the Expectations than in the Opinions condition ($M = 2.15; t(159) = 2.00, p < .05$).

To test the input form \rightarrow subjective closeness \rightarrow purchase model, we further ran a regression with purchase likelihood as the dependent variable and the IOS as the independent variable. This regression yielded a significant effect of closeness ($\beta = .68, t = 12.98, p < .001$).

However, when closeness was included as a covariate in a regression with input mode as the independent factor (with Advice, Control, and Expectations conditions coded as ‘-1’, ‘0’, and ‘1’ respectively) and purchase as the dependent variable, closeness remained a significant predictor of purchase likelihood ($\beta = .62, t = 11.83, p < .001$), whereas the effect of input mode was significantly attenuated ($\beta = -.39, t = -3.69, p < .001$; Sobel $z = -4.12, p < .001$). This suggests subjective closeness mediated the effect of the form of input provided on purchase likelihood. (For this and all other analyses in this experiment, the same mediation results were obtained if the advice versus opinions, and the expectations versus opinions effects were examined separately.)

Empathetic Perspective. We had argued that giving advice gives rise to a subjective feeling of closeness due to the inherent demand of the task, namely, taking an empathetic perspective of the organization. To provide evidence for this process, we had two coders, blind to the hypotheses and experimental conditions, code the content of input for the degree to which the person took an empathic perspective on a 5-point scale ranging from -2 (“restaurant’s perspective”) to 2 (“individual’s perspective”). Coders were instructed that ratings further left on the scale corresponded to a response in which the “respondent took the perspective of someone engaged in identifying what they might do if they were in the place of Splash!” and that ratings further right on the scale corresponded to a response in which the “respondent took a perspective that focused on themselves as an individual and how Splash! could fulfill their individual needs.” Inter-rater agreement was high (Krippendorff’s Alpha = .76), so we averaged both raters’ scores for a single measure of perspective-taking. An omnibus one-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of input form on perspective-taking ($F(2,253) = 28.30, p < .001$). Planned contrasts using one-tailed tests showed that the assumption of the restaurant’s perspective was more prevalent in the

Advice ($M = -.41$) than in the Opinions condition ($M = .20$; $t(154) = -3.89, p < .001$), and that assumption of the restaurant's perspective was lower in the Expectations ($M = .74$) than in the Opinions condition ($M = .20$; $t(173) = 3.72, p < .001$).

To test for the input \rightarrow empathetic perspective \rightarrow subjective closeness process (i.e., the mediating role of perspective taking for closeness), we further ran a regression with the IOS as the dependent variable and coded perspective-taking as the independent variable. This regression showed that perspective-taking significantly predicted closeness ($\beta = -.59, t = -6.81, p < .001$). Finally, when perspective was included as a covariate into a regression with input mode as the independent factor and closeness as the dependent variable, perspective remained a significant predictor of closeness ($\beta = -.51, t = -5.38, p < .001$), but the effect of input mode became non-significant ($\beta = -.24, t = -1.91, p = .06$; Sobel $z = -4.35, p < .001$). This suggests differential perspectives mediated the effect of giving different forms of input on subjective closeness.

Multiple-Step Mediation. Finally, we tested the overall input mode \rightarrow empathetic perspective \rightarrow relationship closeness \rightarrow purchase likelihood model using the multiple-step multiple-mediator model (see figure 3) and bootstrapping method advocated by Hayes et al. (2010). Hayes et al. consider bootstrapping as the most appropriate method of assessment of indirect effects because it requires no assumptions regarding the shape of the sampling distribution of the indirect effect. An indirect effect is considered significant if the 95% confidence interval for the coefficient estimate does not include zero. We used the MEDTHREE macro for SPSS that performs a simultaneous test of a specific indirect effect through both mediators and of specific indirect effects through each mediator alone.

We used bootstrapping to obtain the bias corrected 95 % confidence intervals for the total indirect effect (i.e., total mediated effect) and the specific indirect effects. The coefficients of the

model are presented in figure 3. Below we describe the results for tests of the overall process. Results for each of the partial chains within the model are presented in figure 3.

Figure 3 Here

There was a significant total effect of input on purchase ($\beta = -.72, t = -5.71, p < .001$). Further, the total direct effect (i.e., effect not mediated by the mediators in the model) was significant ($\beta = -.34, t = -2.96, p < .01$), as was the total indirect effect, with a point estimate of $-.39$ and a 95% confidence interval between $-.56$ and $-.20$.

Importantly, an examination of the specific indirect effect through both mediators indicated that the path from input mode to purchase likelihood through both mediators was significant with a point estimate for the effect of $-.18$ and a 95% confidence interval between $-.28$ and $-.10$. The specific indirect effect through perspective taking alone (95% confidence interval from $-.17$ to $.04$) and through relationship closeness alone (95% confidence interval from $-.29$ to $.01$) were not significant, indicating that neither was an independent mediator of the effect of input mode on purchase likelihood. In summary, when taking account of all variables in the model, the input mode \rightarrow empathetic perspective \rightarrow relationship closeness \rightarrow purchase likelihood path through both mediators is significant, whereas the effect of input mode on purchase likelihood through either perspective-taking alone or closeness alone is not significant. This suggests indeed a multiple-step mediation has taken place.

Alternative Explanations. Finally, we examined measures to tap into alternative accounts of valence, helpfulness (foot in the door), and brand image. We did not find differences along any of these dimensions. Specifically, omnibus one-way ANOVA's did not show that participants

varied by input form in the degree to which they focused on negative versus positive thoughts ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 4.95$, $M_{\text{Opinions}} = 5.02$, $M_{\text{Expectations}} = 5.01$; $F < 1$), the degree to which they viewed their input as an act of help ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 4.51$, $M_{\text{Opinions}} = 4.56$, $M_{\text{Expectations}} = 4.80$; $F < 1$), the degree to which they found providing input difficult ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 2.85$, $M_{\text{Opinions}} = 2.56$, $M_{\text{Expectations}} = 2.83$; $F < 1$), or in their perceptions of Splash! as humble ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 4.69$, $M_{\text{Opinions}} = 4.95$, $M_{\text{Expectations}} = 4.72$; $F < 1$) or arrogant ($M_{\text{Advice}} = 2.38$, $M_{\text{Opinions}} = 2.70$, $M_{\text{Expectations}} = 2.94$; $F(2,253) = 2.45$, $p = .09$).

Discussion

Experiment 3 again showed that whereas giving advice increases subsequent transactions with an organization, providing expectations decreases subsequent engagement, relative to the baseline of giving non-specific opinions. Further, experiment 3 provided insight into the mechanism underlying this effect of input. Specifically, we provided evidence for the pivotal role of subjective closeness in the effect of providing inputs. We showed that whereas advice-giving led to a subjective feeling of closeness to the organization, stating expectations created a feeling of distance. This closeness mediated the effect of providing advice/opinions/expectations on the downstream behavior of purchase intent. We then demonstrated the mechanism by which giving advice/opinions/expectations led to differential feelings of closeness, namely, closeness was a result of the characteristics of the thought process inherent in the input mode—whereas giving advice elicits an empathetic perspective towards the advisee, stating expectations shifts the person's perspective to further focus on the customer's self interests. In sum, compared to

giving expectations or opinions, giving advice inherently fosters a feeling of closeness and caring for the organization, as if the organization is part of the self.

In experiment 4, we seek to further shed light on the relationship nature of the effect of advice giving by investigating an interesting moderator of the effect, namely, giving advice for a fee. Paid advice is common when companies hire consultants. Companies may also pay consumers for their feedback. In addition to its practical importance, the condition of paid advice can further illuminate the relationship nature of the effect of advice-giving on subsequent behavior.

We theorized that the effect of advice on subsequent engagement is through increasing a subjective sense of relationship closeness to the organization. As reviewed earlier, conceptually subjective relationship closeness refers to the degree of communal relationship between two parties. If, contrary to our theorizing, the effect of advice giving on engagement is through non-relationship related routes, such as focusing more on the positive aspects of the organization, the effect of advice giving will not be affected by whether the relationship between the advice giver and receiver is perceived as a communal or exchange relationship. On the other hand, if the effect of advice giving is through a change in the way one subjectively relates to an organization, specifically, by feeling closer in a communal way to the organization due to empathetic perspective taking, then defining the customer-organization transaction as an exchange transaction (i.e., a paid transaction) may counteract the effect of advice-giving on shifting the nature of the relationship. That is, despite advice eliciting an empathetic perspective towards the organization, the subjective feeling of closeness is likely to remain relatively distant due to the predefined nature of the relationship as one based on exchange, due to the presence of the payment. Therefore we make the following hypothesis:

H5: When advice is given in exchange for a fee, the positive effect of advice on the propensity to engage with the organization dissipates.

EXPERIMENT 4

The main goal of experiment 4 was to examine the moderating effect of providing a fee for advice on the effect of advice-giving on propensity to engage with an organization.

Method

Experiment 4 had a 2 (Input Form: Advice vs. Opinion) \times 2 (Compensation: None vs. Compensated) between subject design and was performed online. Two-hundred-three (203) participants were recruited from an online subject pool of individuals from throughout the United States and were randomly assigned to conditions. Participants were rewarded for their participation in the study (as well as a series of other unrelated studies) with a raffle entry to win \$25 and \$50 Amazon gift certificates.

Participants were informed that we, as business school faculty, were working with several young businesses. Participants were informed that one of the businesses we were working with, Thai Kra, was “a small Thailand-based manufacturer of seaweed snacks.” The company was “interested in American consumers’ input before possibly launching their seaweed snacks in the United States.” Depending on input form condition, participants were informed that the input being solicited by Thai Kra was either their advice or opinions.

Participants in the Compensation conditions were informed that in return for their input Thai Kra had bought them an extra raffle entry, doubling their chances of winning an Amazon.com gift certificate. Participants in the No Compensation conditions did not receive any information about compensation. All participants then read the same description of the company (see appendix for details).

After reading the company description, participants were asked, depending on condition, for either their advice or opinions regarding Thai Kra's snacks: "We are interested in what (opinions you might have of/advice you might have regarding) our seaweed snacks." Afterwards, participants were thanked for their Input ("Thank you for your advice! (opinions!)"). Opinion (rather than no input) is used as the control so that fee-for-input can be applied to both advice and opinions. Participants in the Compensation conditions were also reminded that "Thai Kra has purchased an extra raffle entry for you in return for your efforts!" Participants were then asked how likely they would be to try Thai Kra's seaweed snacks if they were to become available in their area on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 ("not at all likely") to 7 ("extremely likely").

Results

An ANOVA with purchase likelihood as dependent measure, and input form and compensation as factors revealed a main effect of Input Form on participants' stated likelihood of trying Thai Kra's seaweed snacks, with those providing advice ($M = 4.36$) reporting a greater likelihood of trial than those providing opinions ($M = 3.76$; $F(1,201) = 4.85, p < .05$). Importantly, the main effect of input form was qualified by a significant Input Form \times Compensation interaction ($F(1,199) = 6.82, p < .01$). A planned contrast using a one-tailed test

showed that among participants that were not compensated for their input, there was a greater likelihood of trying Thai Kra's seaweed snacks when they provided advice ($M = 4.81$) than when they provided opinions ($M = 3.50$; $F(1, 100) = 10.83$, $p < .01$, $d = .66$), consistent with all previous experiments. In contrast, among participants that were compensated for their input, there was a similar likelihood of trial regardless of whether they provided advice ($M = 3.89$) or opinions ($M = 4.00$; $F < 1$). Moreover, a planned contrast using a one-tailed test showed that the attenuation of purchase likelihood as a result of compensation for one's advice compared to when not compensated was significant ($M = 3.89$ vs. 4.81 ; $F(1,90) = 5.80$, $p < .01$, $d = .50$). Conversely, there was no difference in purchase likelihood among those compensated ($M = 4.00$) versus uncompensated for their opinions ($M = 3.51$; $F(1,109) = 1.70$, $p > .10$). The null effect of compensation in the opinions condition is noteworthy in that, it shows there is no general positive or negative effect of offering compensation for input on subsequent transactions; instead, the counteractive effect of compensation is only relevant when *advice* is solicited, supporting the specific communal relationship effect of advice-giving that is contradictory to being compensated for one's help.

Figure 4

Discussion

Experiment 4 showed that, consistent with our theorizing, when advice is paid for, the positive effect of soliciting advice on subsequent transactions is eliminated. On the other hand, offering compensation had no effect when opinions were solicited. This result supports our

theorizing that the perception of an exchange transaction with the organization counteracted the effect of relationship closeness engendered by the empathetic perspective taking during advice-giving, thereby eliminating the positive effect of soliciting advice on subsequent engagement.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Key Findings

Our basic proposition was that soliciting different forms of consumer input can differently affect a consumers' subjective experience of relationship closeness with an organization and hence the propensity to engage with it. In particular, in four experiments we found that asking consumers to give advice, compared to no input, opinions, and expectations, uniquely enhances relationship closeness and propensity to transact, as demonstrated in a variety of measures, including willingness-to-donate and purchase likelihood.

Our mediation results also supported perceived relationship distance as a specific mechanism responsible for these behavioral effects (while not necessarily excluding other processes involved). Further, subjective relationship distance is affected by inherent properties of the input solicited whereby advice-giving elicits a thought process involving taking an empathic perspective towards the advice-recipient whereas stating expectations elicits self-focused thoughts.

We also found evidence against a number of alternative explanations for our findings, including a general other-focus due to advice giving (Experiment 1), a differential focus on the positive, a differential ability of consumer input forms to affect a foot-in-the door technique, or a

differential perception of the organization as being humble/arrogant (Experiment 3). Finally, we found a boundary condition for the effect of advice-giving whereby being paid for one's advice eliminated the effect of advice-giving on purchase likelihood (Experiment 4), supporting the role of subjective experience of communal (as opposed to exchange) relationship underlying the positive effect of advice.

Theoretical Implications

This research identifies a potentially important and yet previously unexamined mechanism through which consumer input can affect the propensity to engage with an organization, namely, the consumers' subjective construal of one's relationship with the organization. In addition to predicting novel effects previously unexamined in the literature of soliciting customer input, subjective closeness can also be used to shed further light into the effectiveness of specific programs of soliciting consumer input. For example, past research found inconsistent results for the long-term effect of conducting customer satisfaction surveys or measuring behavioral intentions (e.g., Dholakia and Morwitz 2002; Chandon et al. 2004). Although there might be many factors at play, we propose that one avenue that might be fruitful towards explaining these differences is to closely examine the content and nature of the different surveys. It is possible that the different construction of the surveys may have fostered different degrees of relationship closeness with the marketer, thereby affecting purchase patterns.

Examining relationship distance may also provide insight into recent research on time versus money effects. For instance, Liu and Aaker (2008) found that individuals were more likely to donate money to charity if they had also been previously asked to donate their time than if they

had only been asked to donate money. Related, Mogilner and Aaker (2009) found that spending time versus money with a brand may have differential impacts on brand attitude. Our findings raise the possibility that spending time or thinking of spending time with a brand may have served to decrease the perceived relationship distance between the participants and organization, leading to the subsequent changes in one's engagement with the organization.

More broadly, research shows that changing the construal of a situation from a communal relationship to an economic exchange can have significant impact on subsequent behavior (Gneezy and Rustichini 2000; Heyman and Ariely 2004). Our research suggests a change in the nature of the relationship between a marketer and a customer may be the result of subtle actions such as giving input. We believe the fluid shifts between exchange and communal relationships and their implications on consumer behavior are a rich ground for future research.

Finally, our findings also contribute to research on advice-giving. Whereas prior research has focused on the contents of the advice and their effect on the recipient (e.g., Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; MacGeorge et al., 2004; Wills & DePaulo 1991; Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004), our research is the first to examine the effect of advice-giving on the advice-giver. Future research may further examine the act of giving advice and other forms of input on the provider of the input.

Limitations and Future Research

In this research, we demonstrated the basic effect of giving advice (versus no input, expectations and opinions) on subjective relationship closeness and subsequent willingness to

transact. However, much work is still needed to fully explore the moderators, boundary conditions, and extensions of current findings.

First, research is needed looking to the potential moderating role of several social relationship or social interaction-related constructs. For example, consumers' persuasion knowledge (Friestad and Wright 1994) might play a moderating role to the advice-giving, whereby people with high persuasion knowledge might identify asking for advice as an attempt to manipulate leading to a potentially negative effect of asking for advice. Similarly, the perceived sincerity of the solicitation of advice might critically influence consumer response to such solicitation. For example, the company's overall communications strategy regarding soliciting advice is important such that if consumers detect that the marketer is merely using such a program to make them more involved with the product but does not care about their actual input, such actions might backfire.

Second, in this research we used contexts where there is not an apparent pre-existing status hierarchy in relationship between the customer and the company. However, in some contexts, such hierarchy is either explicitly or implicitly in place. An interesting question is might we also see a positive effect on relationship closeness and subsequent interaction, when a high-status brand (e.g., prestige brand) asks customers for advice? Or when a professor or a supervisor asks a student or subordinate for advice? Related, we have mainly used small non-profits and companies in our studies. Whereas young companies tend to need nurturance, would it be as appropriate for a more mature company to ask for advice from its customers? Further, the effect may depend not on size of the company per se, but the implied brand personality. In general, does brand personality (Aaker 1997) play a role in these effects? For example, some of the industries (e.g., non-profits, restaurant) we used here tend to have a warm personality. Some

of the brands are relatively neutral and tending towards excitement (Thai seaweed, Ecogym). Some of these brands can also be perceived to have a social mission (charity, health, etc.). However, what if a brand has mainly a rugged or competence-based personality? Could the effect of asking for advice backfire? Additionally, besides brand personality, the general likability of a brand may also play a role. Specifically, attempting to get close to a customer might backfire if the customer has a negative attitude towards the brand. If true, this implies brands/product categories that are inherently disliked might do better by maintaining a distant (i.e., strictly exchanged-based) relationship with the customer. Finally, an interesting question remains as to what might happen if an organization solicited customer advice, but subsequently spurned the advice. Would spurning advice eliminate the positive effect of advice, or, may it even have a negative effect compared to when advice was not solicited at all? All of these questions are important and ripe areas for future research.

Third, although we proposed arguments and found evidence for the mechanism of empathetic perspective underlying the effects of advice and expectations, future research can provide more in-depth evidence for the exact processes by which advice or expectations impact empathetic perspective. For example, future research might substantiate our conjecture that stating expectations can lead to the consumers' perception of adopting a higher-status role relative to the marketer. Additionally, in light of the earlier discussion of brand personality, future research might examine whether the contents and nature of advice and expectations differ depending on brand personality.

More broadly, in this research we focused on two forms of consumer input that can affect consumers' subjective closeness to an organization. However, based on insights from this research, future research might delineate a more general theory of consumers' subjective

closeness to an organization, incorporating factors such as similarity and sharing of goals, aspirations and traits between the consumer and the brand, as well as different types of interactions between the consumer and the brand. Some of these factors, such as similarity, have been shown to elicit perceived closeness between people (e.g., Krebs 1975; Stotland 1969), and might serve to determine the “baseline” closeness a consumer feels towards an organization, even before any interactions take place. For example, in experiment 3 we observed that even at baseline consumers’ closeness to the company was non-zero. This presumably occurred just based on how the consumers related to the brand information provided to them. This default closeness is then enhanced by soliciting advice, or stripped away by soliciting expectations. Future research might illuminate the general conditions for subjective closeness towards a brand. Of note, it is possible that in some contexts the baseline closeness with an organization is indeed effectively zero. Such cases are important to consider—for example, in such cases expectations will not have a further negative effect through an effect on relationship closeness. (However, if stating expectations can lower purchase through other mechanisms as well, then purchase might be further reduced by stating expectations even when there is zero closeness existing in the relationship).

Additionally, whereas we contrasted three types of consumer input, future research might examine more types of input (e.g., satisfaction), and their variations, in light of the greater degrees of freedom marketers have in interacting with consumers due to the proliferation of online touchpoints and social media. For example, research might examine the effect of asking consumers to share their stories on Facebook on their interaction with a brand, as previous research suggests self-disclosure tends to create intimacy in relationships (Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco 1998). Moreover, an advice solicitation program might take on multiple stages

of exchange, including, for example, solicitation, acknowledgement, appreciation, and feedback (plans for how to utilize the advice). Further research might examine the roles played by each of these stages in relationship closeness.

Finally, the consequences of giving advice to a company might extend beyond just more transactions. For example, research on relationship closeness shows that people tend to identify with the personality traits of those they feel close to (Galinsky, Wang, and Ku 2008). Thus future research could examine whether soliciting advice can also lead to the consumer merging one's self identity with the brand, which would be a potent outcome for brand building (Keller and Lehmann 2006). Moreover, giving advice might affect brand attachment (Thompson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). Brand attachment is associated with a rich set of behavioral tendencies, such as proximity maintenance, security seeking, separation distress, and viewing the brand as a safe-haven when experiencing distress. An interesting question to examine is to what extent advice-giving can potentially play a role in the process of developing brand attachments. For example, in addition to greater closeness, could advice-giving also change the dependency of the individual towards the brand? In sum, if giving advice fundamentally changes the way people relate to a brand, this may have implications for brand engagement in general. More research, including field research, is needed to more fully elucidate the effect of soliciting customer input such as advice and expectations on both purchases and branding, and establish the robustness and magnitude of these effects, particularly in a field setting.

APPENDIX

Description of Restaurant from Experiment 3

Splash! is a new restaurant concept for a healthy fast casual restaurant. The "fast casual" category is defined by restaurants that do not have full table service, but that have higher quality food and atmosphere than typical fast food establishments. Examples of current restaurants in the fast casual category include Chipotle, Panera, and Noodles and Company.

The main difference between Splash! and other restaurants currently in the fast casual category is the healthiness of the meals. Many meals at most restaurants in the fast casual category exceed FDA limits on sodium and saturated fat for an entire day! All our meals will contain less than one third of the FDA recommended daily allowance for sodium, fat, saturated fat, and calories, and will contain no dangerous trans fats. In addition, we will select ingredients high in healthful nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, and healthy polyunsaturated fats. Our emphasis on healthy nutrition for every item on the menu will make choosing menu options simple for customers because everything they might choose will be healthy. At the same time, our menu items will be fresh, varied and tasty, including salads, sandwiches, soups, as well as featured Mexican and Asian platters.

In addition to Splash!, which is being started by young entrepreneurs investing their own savings, several national restaurant chains are also

considering starting a healthy fast casual restaurant. Because Splash!'s founders do not have the resources of potential competitors, Splash! intends to launch restaurants that will truly stand out. Our restaurants' decor will be spacious and bright and feature a splash of bold colors. Large television screens will be hung from the ceiling displaying information about the nutrition of the meals with side by side comparisons to those of other fast casual restaurants. A typical meal will cost between \$8-\$15.

Description of Thai Kra from Experiment 4

We are a very small Thai company started in 2008 by an 18 year old Thai entrepreneur selling seaweed snacks manufactured by the company under the Thai Kra brand name in Thailand. The seaweed comes in a variety of different forms (e.g., fried, tempura, and baked), flavors (e.g., spicy), and package sizes.

Thai Kra's innovation is to prepare and package seaweed as a handy snack—the seaweed is cooked, flavored, and sliced into snack size shapes (like potato chips) and placed in air-sealed metal foil bags to maintain freshness (see pictures of the Thai version below).

In addition to its unique taste, Thai Kra's seaweed snacks are a much healthier alternative to most traditional snacks. Thai Kra's seaweed snacks are low in calories and fats, and rich in vitamins and minerals.

We are looking to launch our seaweed snacks in the United States sometime next year.



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FIGURE 1

WILLINGNESS TO DONATE TO BUILDING HOPE VERSUS PREMIE PROMISE AFTER GIVING ADVICE TO VERSUS READING ABOUT BUILDING HOPE (TOP PANEL) AND PREMIE PROMISE (BOTTOM PANEL) (EXPERIMENT 1)

FIGURE 2

VERSION OF INCORPORATION OF OTHER IN THE SELF (IOS) SCALE ADAPTED FROM ARON ET AL. (1991) (EXPERIMENT 3)

FIGURE 3

MODEL OF EFFECT OF CONSUMER INPUT FORM ON PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD (EXPERIMENT 3)

FIGURE 4

EFFECT OF COMPENSATION AND INPUT FORM ON PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD OF THAI KRA (EXPERIMENT 4)

FIGURE 1

WILLINGNESS TO DONATE TO BUILDING HOPE VERSUS PREMIE PROMISE AFTER GIVING ADVICE TO VERSUS READING ABOUT BUILDING HOPE (TOP PANEL) AND PREMIE PROMISE (BOTTOM PANEL) (EXPERIMENT 1)

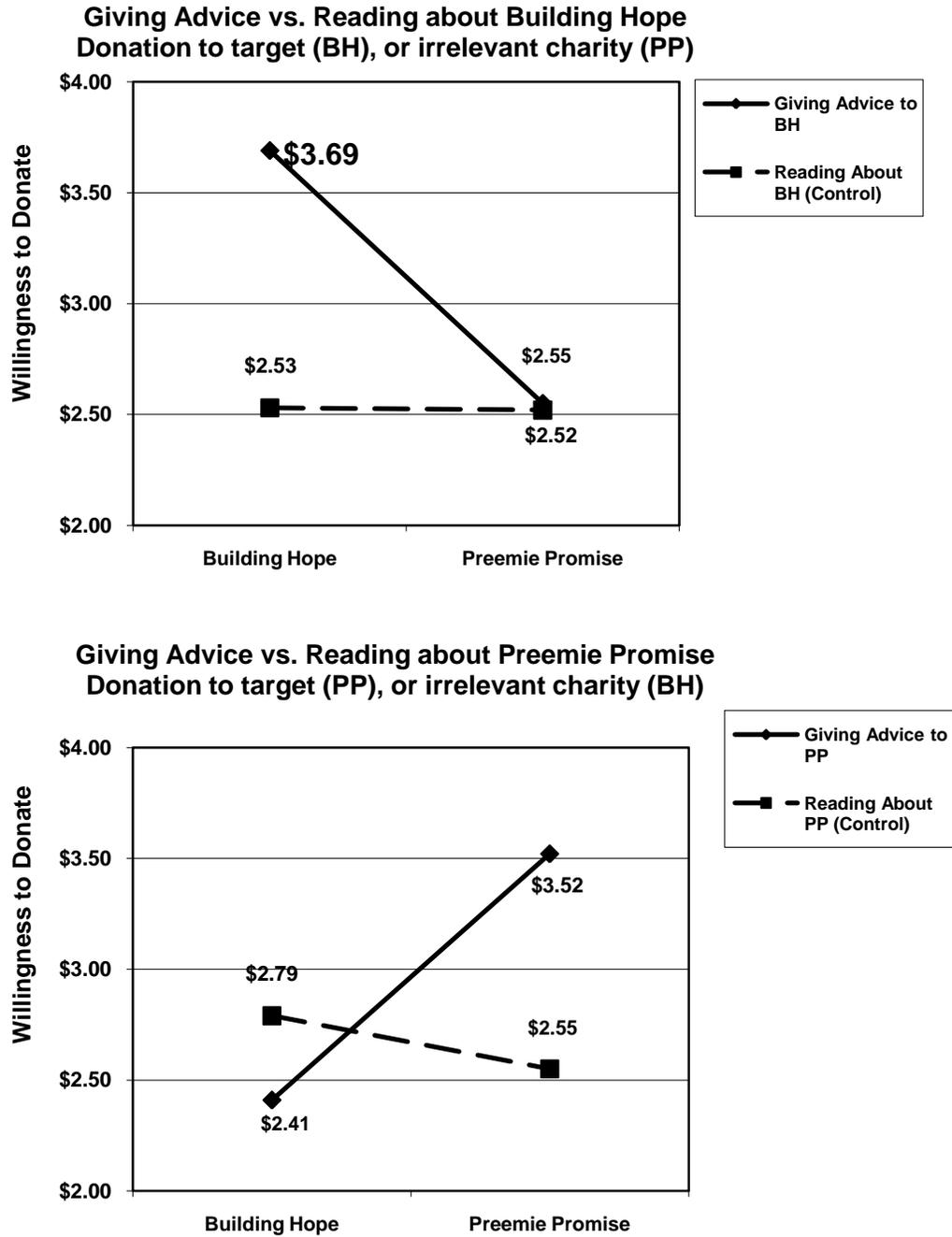


FIGURE 2

VERSION OF INCORPORATION OF OTHER IN THE SELF (IOS) SCALE ADAPTED
FROM ARON ET AL. (1991) (EXPERIMENT 3)

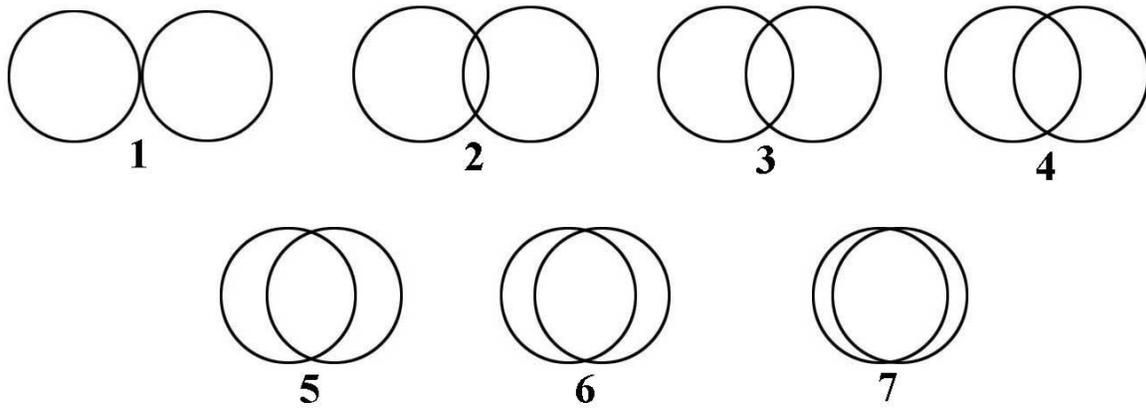
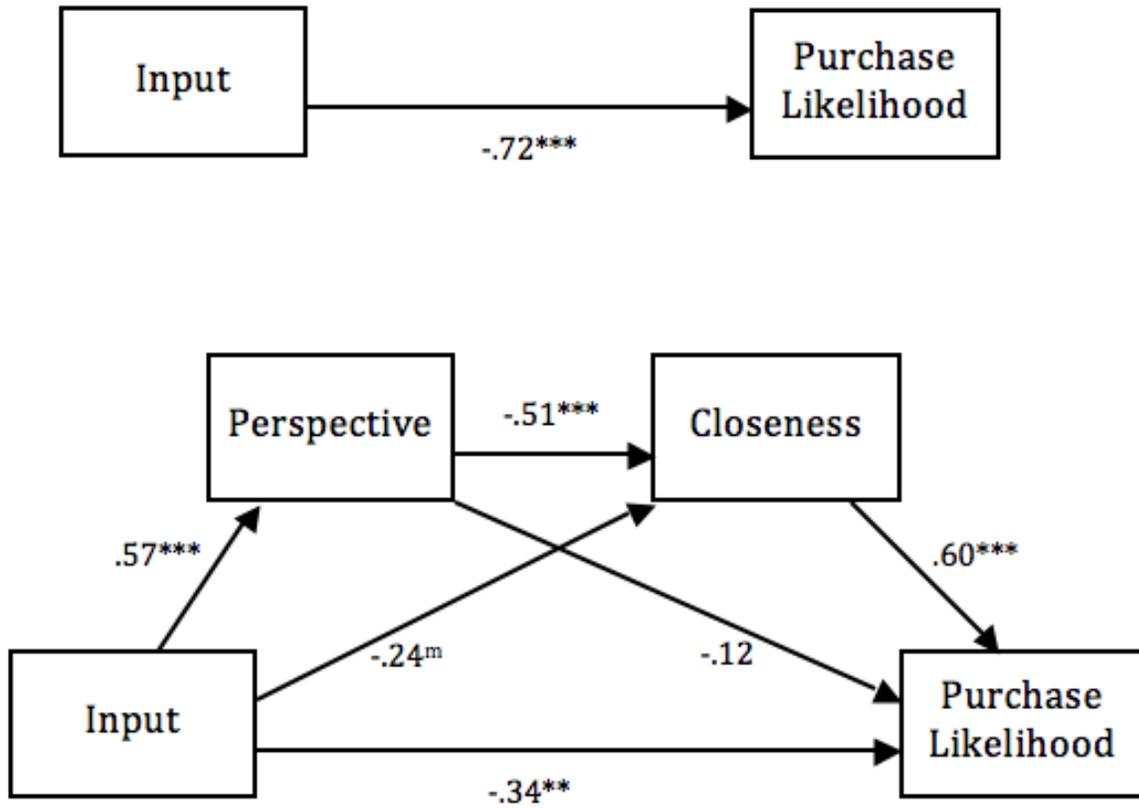


FIGURE 3

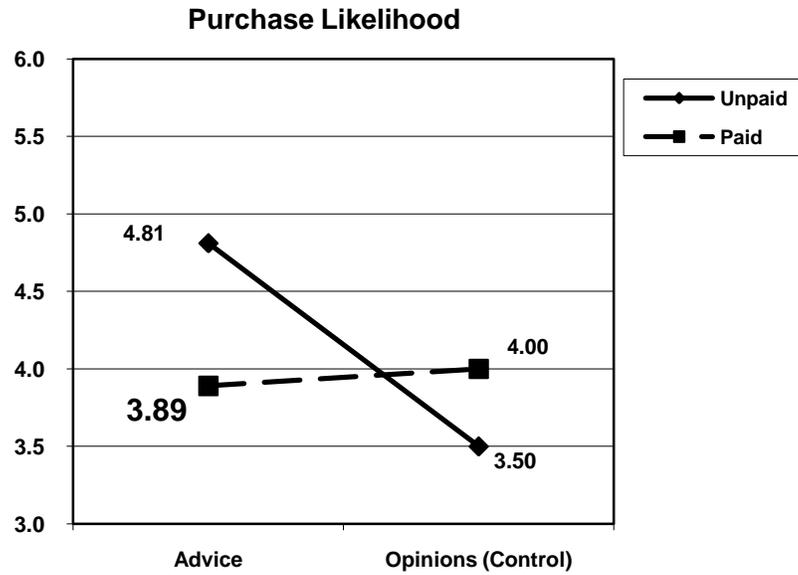
MODEL OF EFFECT OF CONSUMER INPUT FORM ON PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD
(EXPERIMENT 3)



Note: ^m $p = .06$
^{**} $p < .01$
^{***} $p < .001$

FIGURE 4

EFFECT OF COMPENSATION AND INPUT FORM ON PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD OF THAI KRA (EXPERIMENT 4)



1) THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- 2) Social Relationships and Relationship Closeness
- 2) Shifting Perceptions of Relationship Closeness
- 2) Advice and Relationship Closeness
- 2) Contrasting Advice to Other Forms of Inputs

1) EXPERIMENT 1

- 2) Method
- 2) Results
- 2) Discussion

1) EXPERIMENT 2

- 2) Method
- 2) Results
- 2) Discussion

1) EXPERIMENT 3

- 2) Method
- 2) Results
 - 3) *Purchase Likelihood*
 - 3) *Subjective Closeness*
 - 3) *Empathetic Perspective*
 - 3) *Multiple-Step Mediation*
 - 3) *Alternative Explanations*
- 2) Discussion

1) EXPERIMENT 4

- 2) Method
- 2) Results
- 2) Discussion

1) GENERAL DISCUSSION

- 2) Key Findings
- 2) Theoretical Implications
- 2) Limitations and Future Research