Feedback on Product Recommendations

by

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Dedicated to my loving family

ABSTRACT

Feedback on Product Recommendations

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Consumers frequently engage in product-related conversations and influence each other's attitudes and behavior. Marketers have long recognized the importance of these conversations for the success of their brands. However, scholarly research has predominantly focused on the initial phase of recommendations, wherein one consumer suggests a product to another. This thesis acknowledges that product recommendation conversations could extend beyond the initial recommendation, with recipients subsequently offering feedback to recommenders about their experiences with the recommended product. Through two different essays, this thesis provides a through exploration of whether, how, and why recommenders adjust their assessments of both the recipient and the recommended product in response to feedback. Specifically, the first essay focuses on the valence of feedback, its underlying process, and the moderating role of product commitment. The second essay examines the content and linguistic style of feedback, its impact on recommenders' evaluation, the underlying process, and its utilization by recipients. Findings, collectively, yield profound insights into the intricate dynamics of consumer-brand relationships, interpersonal connections, and consumer well-being.

ÖZETÇE

Ürün Önerileri
Hakkında Geri
Bildirim

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Tüketiciler sıklıkla ürünle ilgili konuşmalar yapmakta ve birbirlerinin tutum ve davranışlarını etkilemektedir. Pazarlamacılar, markalarının başarısı için bu sohbetlerin önemini uzun zamandır kabul etmektedir. Bununla birlikte, bilimsel araştırmalar ağırlıklı olarak bir tüketicinin diğerine bir ürün önerdiği ilk öneri aşamasına odaklanmıştır. Bu tez, ürün tavsiye görüşmelerinin ilk tavsiyenin ötesine geçebileceğini, alıcıların daha sonra tavsiye edilen ürünle ilgili deneyimleri hakkında tavsiye edenlere geri bildirimde bulunabileceğini kabul etmektedir. Bu tez, iki farklı makale aracılığıyla, tavsiye edenlerin geri bildirimlere yanıt olarak hem alıcıya hem de tavsiye edilen ürüne ilişkin değerlendirmelerini değiştirip değiştirmediklerini, nasıl ve neden değiştirdiklerini araştırmaktadır. Spesifik olarak, ilk makale geribildirimin değerine, altında yatan sürece ve ürün bağlılığının değiştirici rolüne odaklanmaktadır. İkinci makale geribildirimin içeriğini ve dilsel tarzını, tavsiye edenin değerlendirmesi üzerindeki etkisini, altta yatan süreci ve alıcılar tarafından kullanımını incelemektedir. Bulgular, toplu olarak, tüketici-marka ilişkilerinin karmaşık dinamikleri, kişilerarası bağlantılar ve tüketici refahı hakkında derin içgörüler sağlamaktadır.

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ABBREVIATIONS

LIWC	Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count
WOM	Word-of-Mouth

Chapter 1

1. INTRODUCTION

Consumers frequently engage in product related conversations, and marketers have long recognized the importance of these conversations for the success of their brands. Consistently, marketing researchers have devoted substantial effort to understanding how product recommendations influence consumer behavior. However, the majority of existing studies focus on the initial phase of product recommendations, wherein an individual (the recommender) recommends a product to another individual (the recipient). What is overlooked within this literature is the subsequent course of these conversations. This thesis acknowledges the possibility that product related conversations might extend beyond the initial recommendation, and recipients could subsequently provide feedback to recommenders about their experience with recommended products. In two different essays, the thesis examines how recommenders update their evaluations of the recipient and the recommended product in response to feedback.

1.1 Synopsis of Essay 1

Consumers often promote and recommend products to others and others make purchases based on these recommendations. While existing literature offers a profound understanding of how recommendations influence recipients' behavior, there is limited knowledge of consequences for recommenders. The first essay addresses this knowledge gap by bringing an understanding of what happens when the dialogue between a recommender and a recipient includes feedback, that is the recommender learns the recipient's experience with the recommended product. The essay presents a systematic set of studies that demonstrate how receiving feedback influences the recommender's evaluations of the recipient and the product. Results show that recommenders adjust their evaluations of both the recipient and the product, and these effects are mediated by perceived similarity with the recipient. Additionally, the effect of positive feedback on recipient evaluation disappears

when recommenders have low product commitment, whereas the impact on product evaluation disappears when recommenders have high product commitment. Findings provide valuable insights into the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships, interpersonal relationships, and consumer well-being.

1.2 Synopsis of Essay 2

Building upon the preceding exploration of how recommenders adjust their evaluations based on feedback valence, this essay takes into account the content and linguistic style of feedback. In particular, we focus on linguistic choices in feedback that emphasize either the recipient or the recommended product through the usage of content focus (product-focused vs. user-focused). We argue that through these additional cues, the recommender could infer the underlying reasons behind the outcome of the recommendation, and update evaluations of the recipient accordingly. We find that positive feedback has a more favorable effect on recipient evaluations when the emphasis is placed on the product, rather than on the recipient. Further, this effect is driven by the recommender's increased tendency to attribute positive outcomes to the recommended product, which then enables them to share credit for the positive outcome. Conversely, feedback that emphasizes the recipient is discounted as it fails to facilitate such sharing. Collectively, findings advance existing knowledge within diverse streams of marketing literature including product recommendations, linguistics, and attribution theory.

Chapter 2

2. THE EFFECT OF FEEDBACK VALENCE ON RECOMMENDERS' EVALUATIONS

2.1 Introduction

Imagine recommending one of your favorite books to a friend. How would you feel if she raves about it, calling it one of the best reads ever? Conversely, how would you feel if she tells you that the book did not work out to her liking? Others may have positive or negative experiences acting on our recommendations, but would their reactions affect your evaluation of the book, or even of your friend? While product recommendations are widespread and have garnered significant research interest, most of this attention has centered on the behavior of the recipient —the individual receiving the recommendation. Comparatively little attention has been directed towards understanding the consequences for the recommender—the individual making the recommendation—, leaving questions like the ones posed above largely unexplored.

Plausibly, product recommendation conversations could extend beyond just the recommendations themselves and include recipients' feedback regarding their experiences with the product. To substantiate this notion, we conducted a survey involving 188 students, incentivized with course credit, and asked them to imagine receiving a movie recommendation from a friend. An overwhelming 89.4% expressed the intention to provide feedback on whether they liked the movie, underscoring that feedback following a recommendation is a common occurrence. Acknowledging this dynamic nature of recommendations, we broaden the understanding of product-related conversations and the resulting consumer behavior by incorporating the notion of feedback, which we define as information revealing the recipients' liking or disliking of the product.

Specifically, we investigate whether and how recommenders change their evaluations of both a recommended product and a recipient upon receiving feedback. Figure 2.1 illustrates our conceptualization of the recommendation and feedback process among consumers. First, the recommender provides a recommendation to the recipient at time t_1. The recipient then gives feedback at time t_2 about the recommended product (e.g., expressing liking or disliking a recommended restaurant). In response to the feedback, the recommender revaluates both the recipient and the product at time t_3. Our objective is to explore how the recommender's assessment of the product and the recipient shifts in response to the feedback, the underlying mechanism, and the boundary conditions.

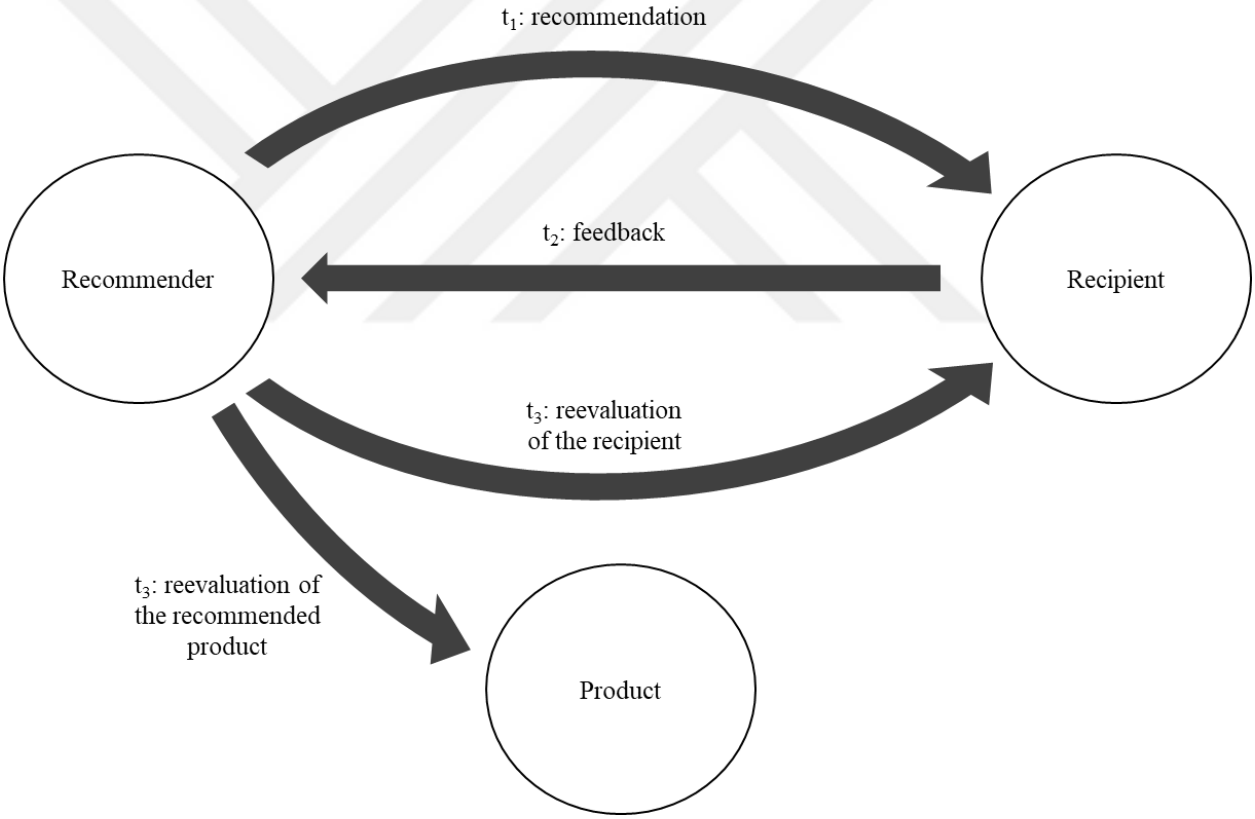

Figure 2.1 Conceptualization of the Recommendation and Feedback Process

The present research contributes to the existing literature on multiple fronts. First, a significant body of work in marketing literature examines the consequences of product recommendations (e.g., Fitzsimons and Lehmann 2004; Gershoff, Broniarczyk, and West

2001; Packard, Gershoff, and Wooten 2016). However, the focus has predominantly been on the recipient's behavior (e.g., whether the recipient purchases the product upon recommendation) and there is a limited understanding of the consequences for the recommender (see Claus et al. 2012; Moore 2012; Shen and Sengupta 2018 for exceptions). We advance this understanding by investigating how recommenders update their evaluations of the product and the recipient upon receiving feedback. This contribution aligns with the notion that consumers product-related conversations often persist beyond the initial recommendation.

Second, we explore a process that underlies the effect of feedback valence on recipient and product evaluations. We demonstrate that the perceived similarity between the recommender and the recipient mediates the effect. Our conceptualization views feedback as a mechanism through which consumers infer similarity judgments. Specifically, feedback enables recommenders to deduce whether their preferences match with those of the recipients, signaling similarity between them (see Tuk, Verlegh, Smidts, and Wigboldus 2019). Understanding the consequences of feedback bears substantial implications for consumer wellbeing, given that existing research underlines a robust link between agreeing with others on everyday decisions and the quality of personal relationships (Berscheid and Ammazzalorso 2001; Fehr and Harasymchuk 2005; Levinger and Breedlove 1966), — a phenomenon that extends even to mundane brand choices in everyday products (Brick et al. 2018).

Third, we demonstrate that product commitment moderates the effect of feedback on recipient and product evaluations. A substantial body of marketing research explores the notion of product commitment and its implications (Fournier 1998; Fetscherin and Heinrich 2014; Zemack-Rugar et al. 2017). So far, strong product commitment has been linked to increased levels of loyalty, higher consumption frequency, and enhanced product liking (Aggarwal 2004; Fedorikhin et al. 2008). Our findings extend the role of this variable to product recommendations. Revealing that the level of product commitment yields contrasting effects on recipient and product evaluations, we shed light on the multifaceted nature of consumer evaluations.

Lastly, insights from our study could be relevant to research on advice-taking, which has demonstrated that individuals tend to rely on their own beliefs and discount the opinions of others, particularly when a significant disparity exists between their initial beliefs and the received advice (Yaniv and Kleinberger 2000). In the context of product recommendations, we demonstrate that consumers incorporate others' opinions to reevaluate their own beliefs.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, we provide an in-depth discussion of the theoretical background. In Section 3, we present our empirical studies and discuss their findings. In Section 4, we close with a general discussion of findings, theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and future research avenues.

2.2 Theoretical Background

2.2.1 Prior Research on Product Recommendations

Product recommendations have been a topic of substantial interest within word-of-mouth literature, with a plethora of studies aimed at understanding the motivations behind giving product recommendations and the subsequent behavior of recipients. Regarding motivations, the literature has revealed that people give product recommendations for various reasons such as protecting their well-being (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004), fulfilling the self-presentation motive (e.g., De Angelis et al. 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Packard and Wooten 2013), projecting competence and knowledge (Craven and Potter 2010), and signaling their identity (Bellezza, Gino, and Keinan 2014). Regarding consequences, much of the existing research primarily focuses on the attitudes and behavior of recipients. For instance, studies have demonstrated that product recommendations generate awareness and reshape expectations (Liu 2006; Van den Bulte and Wuyts 2009), enhance preferences for the recommended product, and subsequently drive sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Godes and Mayzlin 2009; Herr, Kardes and Kim 1991).

In contrast to recipients, our understanding of the consequences for recommenders is limited, with existing insights centered on the recommender-brand relationships. It is shown that factors like the style (speaking versus writing about a brand) (Shen and Sengupta 2018) or linguistic content of recommendations (Moore 2012) affect recommenders' subsequent reactions, such as their intentions to reuse the product or make further recommendations. In

addition, recommendations enhance the recommender's attitudinal and behavioral loyalty toward the product through affective commitment (Garnefeld, Helm, and Eggert 2011). Lastly, recommendations also influence recommenders' evaluation of the self, with implicit egotism intensifying when a recommendation is not adopted by the recipient (Claus et al. 2012).

Extending this stream of work, we focus on the dyadic word-of-mouth setting in which consumers recommend a product, followed by the recipient providing feedback. We explore the role of feedback on both the relationship between the recommender and the recipient, as well as the relationship between the recommender and the product. By doing so, we aim to advance the current understanding of product recommendations.

2.2.2 The Effect of Feedback on Recommenders' Evaluation of Recipients

In product recommendations, consumers not only exchange information about products but also reveal aspects of themselves (De Angelis et al. 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Packard and Wooten 2013). This facet allows consumers to potentially infer similarity judgments by observing each other's consumption choices. Based on this rationale, we propose that feedback, by disclosing whether there exists an alignment in product preferences, influences judgments of perceived similarity. Specifically, positive feedback is likely to heighten recommenders' perception of similarity with the recipient, whereas negative feedback is expected to have an adverse effect on perceived similarity.

A substantial amount of evidence supports the notion that similarity is a determinant of interpersonal attraction (e.g., Berscheid and Ammozolorso 2001; Byrne 1961; Byrne, Clore, and Worchel 1966). People show more appreciation and attraction towards others who share similar personality characteristics and interests (e.g., AhYun 2002). Positive attitudes can even be formed when similarities are trivial and not rooted in deeply held values. For example, sharing the same birthday or similar surnames promotes favorable attitudes toward others (Miller, Downs, and Prentice 1998). At the other end of the spectrum, individuals are less likely to identify with or like others with dissimilar personalities (e.g., Liao, Joshi, and Chuang 2004). Dissimilar others are also perceived as more threatening and less trustworthy (Tanis and Postmes 2005), in addition to being perceived as less intelligent and knowledgeable (Byrne 1961).

Consistent with the view that similarities drive interpersonal attraction, we propose that the valence of feedback (positive vs. negative) influences recommenders' assessments of perceived similarity with the recipient. This assessment, in turn, influences the recommender's attitude toward the recipient. Notably, this prediction aligns with extensively documented findings that individuals use brands to signal their identity (Belk 1988; Berger and Heath 2007; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Malhotra 1988), and agreement on consumption choices, such as preferences for similar brands, holds a pivotal role in interpersonal relationships (Brick et al. 2018; Chen 2017).

Following the discussion above, we formally hypothesize that:

H_1: Positive (negative) feedback leads to a more (less) favorable evaluation of the recipient.

H_2: The relationship between feedback valence and the evaluation of the recipient is mediated by perceived similarity.

2.2.3 The Effect of Feedback on Recommenders' Evaluation of Recommended Products

Upon receiving positive or negative feedback, recommenders develop a perception of similarity or dissimilarity between themselves and the recipient. In this process, they consider the product as a crucial indicator of this perceived similarity or dissimilarity. Prior research consistently supports the idea that individuals rely on products as cues to navigate their interpersonal relationships effectively. For instance, McKnight, Cummings, and Chervany (1998) revealed that people use products as cues to assess trustworthiness in others, while Woolley and Fishbach (2017) found that similar food consumption serves as a cue for social interactions.

As recommenders associate the product with the perceived similarity or dissimilarity, they concurrently link the product to the origin of this cognitive alignment (Tsiros, Mittal, and Ross 2004; Weiner 2000). If the recommenders receive positive (negative) feedback, it results in an increase in their liking (disliking) of the recipient due to perceived similarities (dissimilarities). Furthermore, the perceived similarity (or dissimilarity) between the recommender and recipient may affect the recommender's perception of the product,

potentially leading to a realignment of their evaluation of it because the recommender might ascribe some degree of accountability to the product for the perceived similarity.

In alignment with these findings, we contend that products function as cues, signifying similarity or dissimilarity with others. Recommenders assign accountability to the product for the similarity. As a result, the perception of similarity influences product evaluations. Specifically, positive (negative) feedback enhances (decreases) the recommender's evaluation of the product.

Given the arguments above, we hypothesize that:

H_3: Positive (negative) feedback leads to a more (less) favorable evaluation of the product.

H_4: The relationship between feedback valence and the evaluation of the product is mediated by perceived similarity.

2.2.4 The Moderating Effect of Product Commitment

The effect of the feedback on evaluations of both the recipient and the product could change depending on the extent to which the recommender is committed to the product. Higher levels of product commitment, indicative of a long-term relationship between the recommender and the product (Fetscherin and Heinrich 2014; Fournier 1998), are linked to higher levels of self-brand connection, loyalty, consumption frequency, and product liking (Aggarwal 2004; Fedorikhin et al. 2008).

We predict that the valence of feedback will have a more pronounced effect on the evaluations of the recipient when a high-commitment product is recommended. This is because recommendations of high committed products (which are closer to self) are more self-disclosing, and therefore the recommender experiences greater comfort or discomfort upon inferring similarity judgments. For example, positive feedback could reinforce benefits such as self-verification, while negative feedback might be perceived as self-threatening. The similarity or dissimilarity pertaining to attributes closely tied to the self should strengthen the effect on recipient evaluations. In parallel, we anticipate that the effect will be attenuated when there is low commitment.

Formally, we hypothesize the following:

H_5: Product commitment moderates the effect of the perceived similarity on recipient evaluation, such that the effect will be stronger when commitment is high, and the effect is weaker when commitment is low.

We expect the valence of feedback to have a less pronounced effect on product evaluations when a high-commitment product is recommended. A long-term relationship and a strong connection with a high product commitment make consumers trust (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel 2004; Fournier 1998, 2014) Individuals with high levels of product commitment tend to be more certain of the product's performance. This, in turn, makes them less likely to reevaluate the product in light of received feedback. Conversely, in lower levels of product commitment, consumers have relatively short-term relationships with the product and may not hold a strong conviction about the product's performance. Consequently, they are more susceptible to the information revealed by feedback. Furthermore, in the absence of a strong attachment, it would be easier to change the evaluations of the product.

Formally, we expect the following:

H_6: Product commitment moderates the effect of the perceived similarity on product evaluation, such that the effect will be weaker when commitment is high, and the effect is stronger when commitment is low.

In sum, we propose that the valence of the feedback influences the recipient (H_1) and product evaluations (H_3). These effects are mediated by the perceived similarity between the recipient and the recommender (H_2 and H_4) and moderated by product commitment (H_5 and H_6). Our conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.2.

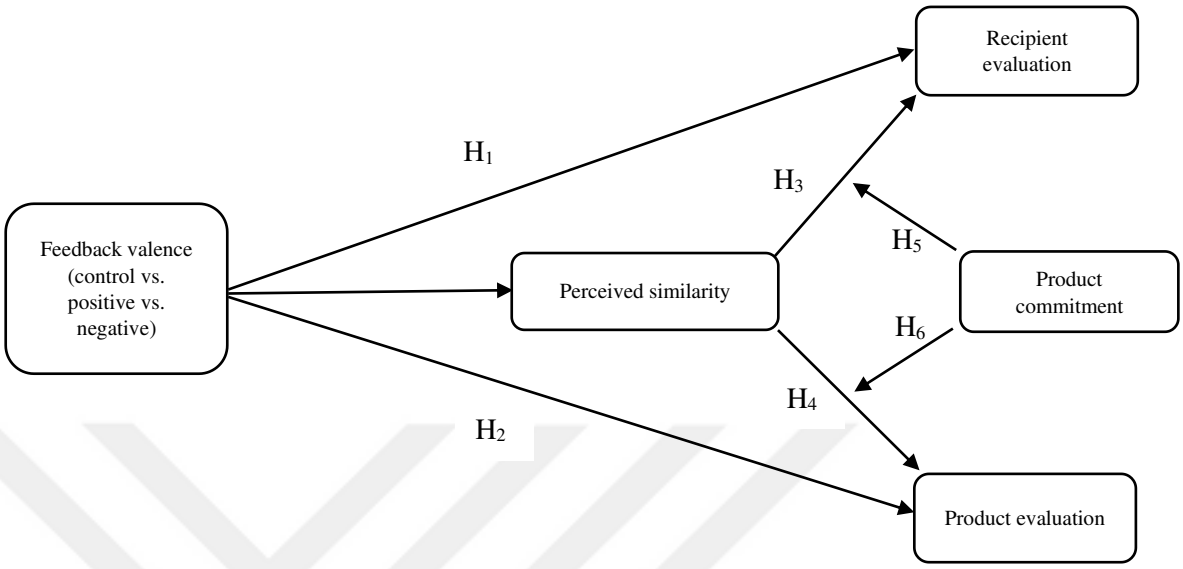

Figure 2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.3 Empirical Analysis

Our empirical analysis includes seven studies aimed at examining the effect of feedback on product and recipient evaluations, the underlying process, and the moderating effects of product commitment. Table 2.1 presents an overview of these studies. In Study 1, we examine the main effect by demonstrating how the valence of feedback influences the recommender's evaluations of the recipient and the product. In Study 2, we replicate this effect while accounting for the potential influence of prior evaluations of the product and recipient. Study 3 replicates the main effect in a real conversation setting, and Study 4 replicates the effect using a survey that examines consumers' real-life experiences. In Study 5, we investigate the mediating role of perceived similarity, ruling out alternative mechanisms. The same underlying process is further tested in Study 6, wherein we manipulate the mediating variable. Finally, Study 7 investigates the moderating role of product commitment.

Table 2.1: Overview of Studies

Study	Hypothesis and Goal	Data	Receiver	Product	Design	DVs
Study 1	H1 and H3: Testing main effects	Online experiment: 300 Prolific workers	Colleague	Software	Between: 3 Feedback valence (no feedback vs. positive vs. negative)	Recipient and Product Evaluations
Study 2	H1 and H3: Testing main effects	Online experiment: 320 Prolific workers	Friend	Restaurant	Mixed: 2 Feedback valence (positive vs. negative) x Evaluation Type (pre vs. post)	Recipient and Product Evaluations
Study 3	H1 and H3: Testing main effects	Online field experiment: 120 Prolific workers	Colleague	Game	Between: 2 Feedback valence (positive vs. negative)	Recipient and Product Evaluations
Study 4	H3: Testing main effects	Online survey: 340 Prolific workers	Open-ended: participants describe product type		Survey	Product Evaluations and Subsequent Recommendation Intention
Study 5	H2 and H4: Testing the mediating effect of similarity	Lab experiment: 236 students	Colleague	Software	Between: 2 Feedback valence (positive vs. negative)	Recipient and Product Evaluations

	and ruling out alternative processes					
Study 6	H2 and H4: Testing the mediating effect of similarity by moderation	Online experiment: 440 Prolific workers	Other professionals	Software	Between: 2 Feedback valence (positive vs. negative) x 2 Similarity (similar vs. dissimilar)	Recipient and Product Evaluations
Study 7	H5 and H6: Testing moderated mediation; the mediating role of perceived similarity and moderating role of product commitment	Online experiment: 520 Prolific workers	Colleague	Software	Between: 3 Feedback valence (no feedback vs. positive vs. negative) x 2 Product commitment (high vs. low)	Recipient and Product Evaluations (Attitude and Affective)

2.3.1 Study 1: Preregistered Main Effect

This study investigates the effect of feedback on recipient and product evaluations in the context of a product recommendation. Specifically, participants were asked to imagine recommending a product to a colleague and then receiving feedback from that person about

their experience with the product. To ensure methodological rigor, Study 1 was preregistered on AsPredicted.org.

Method

Participants. We recruited three hundred participants from Prolific Academic, who received a small, fixed payment for their participation. After applying predetermined exclusion criteria outlined in the preregistration, we removed participants who failed to complete the study, failed attention checks (i.e., choose two), or completed the study too slowly or too quickly. The final sample included two hundred and sixty-nine participants (62.1% women, median age = 24 years).

Design. This study utilized a three-level, one-way between-participants design that was preregistered with expected effects, an analysis plan, and exclusion criteria. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: positive feedback, negative feedback, or control (no feedback). They were then asked to imagine recommending software to one of their colleagues. In the positive and negative feedback conditions, participants received feedback from their colleagues about their experience with the software. In the control condition, no feedback was shown to the participants. Details of the manipulations are provided in Appendix B.

After imagining the feedback scenario, participants completed two sets of scales. First, they evaluated the recommended product using the product evaluation scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004), which consisted of two items measuring the product's appeal and quality on a nine-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .972$). Second, participants evaluated the recipient using a ten-item scale measuring traits such as good-naturedness, sincerity, and arrogance, among others, on a seven-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .893$). These traits were derived from Fragale et al.'s (2009) other-concern traits and from Wiggin's (1979) interpersonal taxonomy that is relevant to giving and receiving feedback. Finally, we asked participants to rate the valence of the feedback they received on a seven-point scale (1 = negative, 7 = positive) to check the manipulation's effectiveness.

Results

Manipulation check. An ANOVA revealed that the feedback valence manipulation was successful ($F(1, 178) = 1057.975$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .856$). Specifically, participants in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 1.9565$, $SD = 1.11841$) evaluated the feedback as significantly more negative than participants in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 6.5227$, $SD = .71079$).

Recipient Evaluation. An ANOVA was conducted using feedback valence as the independent variable and recipient evaluation as the dependent variable. Results showed a significant main effect ($F(2, 266) = 178.667$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .573$). The recipient was evaluated significantly less positively in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 3.5402$, $SD = .71238$) than in the control condition ($M_{control} = 4.7449$, $SD = .75619$, $F(1, 266) = 127.873$, $p< .001$, $\eta 2 = .325$), or in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 5.5432$, $SD = .67871$, $F(1, 266) = 351.437$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .569$). Moreover, those in the positive feedback condition evaluated the recipient significantly higher than those in the no-feedback (control) condition ($F(1, 266) = 54.912$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .171$).

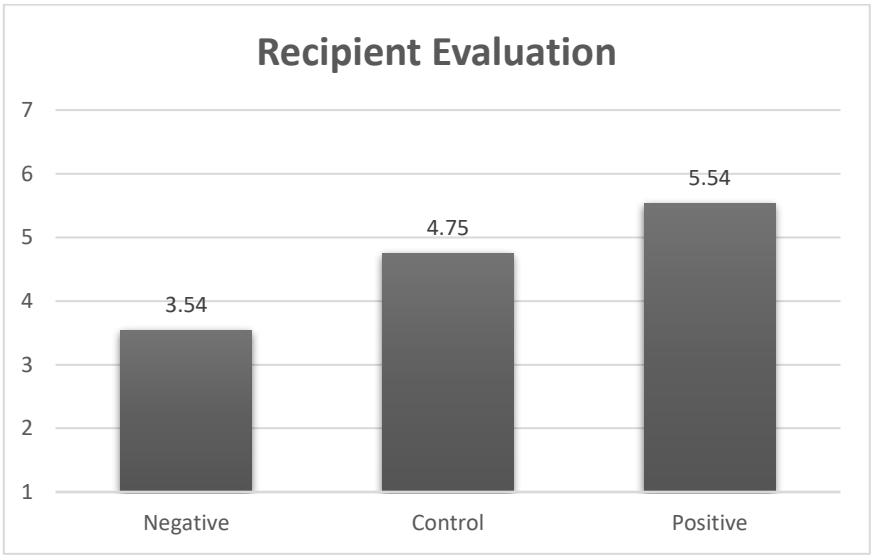

Figure 2.3: The effect of feedback on recipient evaluation (Study 1)

Product Evaluation. The results of an ANOVA on the product evaluation showed a significant main effect for feedback valence ($F(2, 266) = 329.189$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .712$). Consistent with our hypothesis, product evaluations were significantly less favorable in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 3.0489$, $SD = 1.62748$) than in the control condition ($M_{control} = 7.3258$, $SD = 1.32094$, $F(1, 266) = 409.903$, $p< .001$, $\eta 2 = .606$) and in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 8.0625$, $SD = 1.27940$, $F(1, 266) = 560.032$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .678$). Furthermore, the difference between product evaluations in the positive feedback and control conditions was significant ($F(1, 266) = 11.895$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .043$).

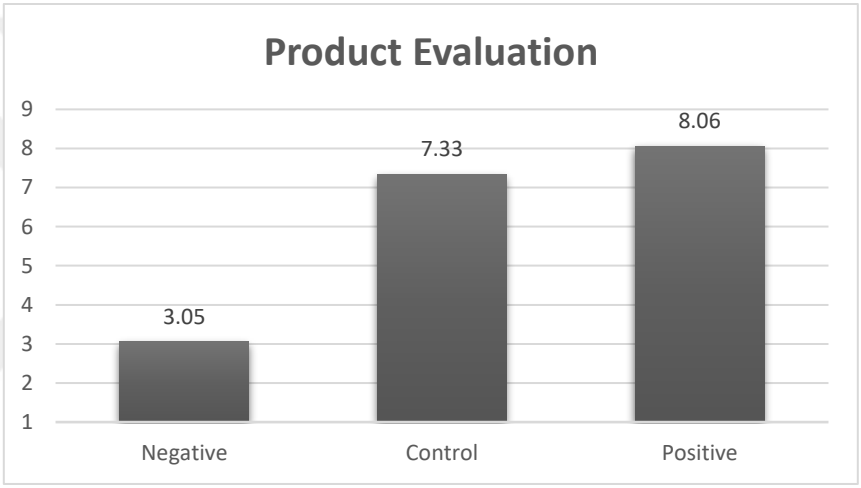

Figure 2.4: The effect of feedback on product evaluation (Study 1)

Discussion

Study 1 provides evidence that feedback valence affects the evaluations of the product and the recipient. In particular, we find that participants in the negative (positive) feedback condition evaluated the product and the recipient less positively (more positively) than the participants in the control condition. This finding stands in contrast with the balance theory for two reasons. First, our finding reveals that the evaluations of two players are adjusted in recommendation and feedback context. Second, evaluations are adjusted in response to not only negative feedback but also positive feedback.

2.3.2 Study 2: Main Effect with Prior Evaluation

In this study, we seek to replicate the results of Study 1 using a different design and product category. Additionally, we asked participants to think of a real product and a real person of which and whom they already had prior evaluations and the design allowed us to compare pre and post-evaluations.

Method

Participants. Three hundred and twenty participants were recruited from Prolific Academic for the study in exchange for monetary compensation. Applying exclusion criteria similar to Study 1, we arrived at our final sample, which consists of three hundred and twelve respondents (58.3% women, median age=30 years).

Design. This study used a mixed-subjects design (a single factor between-subjects and repeated-subjects designs). Between-subjects design includes positive feedback and negative feedback, and the repeated-subjects design has pre- and post-evaluations.

All participants were asked to think of a friend and then write the name of that friend. Participants further indicated their evaluation of the friend (good-natured, sincere, arrogant, etc., 10 items; seven-point scale; Cronbach's α =.823; derived from Fragale et al. 2009 and Wiggins 1979). Next, participants imagined recommending a restaurant to a friend. After asking them which restaurant they would recommend, we wanted participants to provide an initial evaluation of the restaurant (Spears and Singh 2004) via a nine-point scale on two items ("appealing" and "good", 1-not at all, 9-extremely: Cronbach's α =.867).

Next, participants received feedback from their friends about their friend's experiences. The manipulations used in the study are presented in Appendix B. Lastly, participants completed the same recipient evaluation scale (Cronbach's α = .894) and product evaluation scale (Cronbach's α = .981) again.

Results

Recipient Evaluation. We further repeated-measures ANOVA using recipient evaluation (pre vs. post) as a within-subjects factor and feedback valence (negative vs.

positive) as a between-subjects factor. Results revealed a significant main effect for recipient evaluation, $F(1, 310) = 97.842$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .240$. Contrast analyses showed that participants' evaluations of the recipient significantly differed between pre- and post-evaluations after receiving negative feedback ($M_{pre\text{-}negative} = 5.6516$, $SD = 0.85894$; $M_{post\text{-}negative} = 5.0732$, $SD = 1.10477$), $p<.001$ with post-evaluations being less favorable. Conversely, in the positive feedback condition, post-evaluations were significantly more favorable than pre-evaluations ($M_{pre\text{-}positive} = 5.6113$, $SD = 0.75288$; $M_{post\text{-}positive} = 5.7956$, $SD = 0.78679$), $p=.001$.

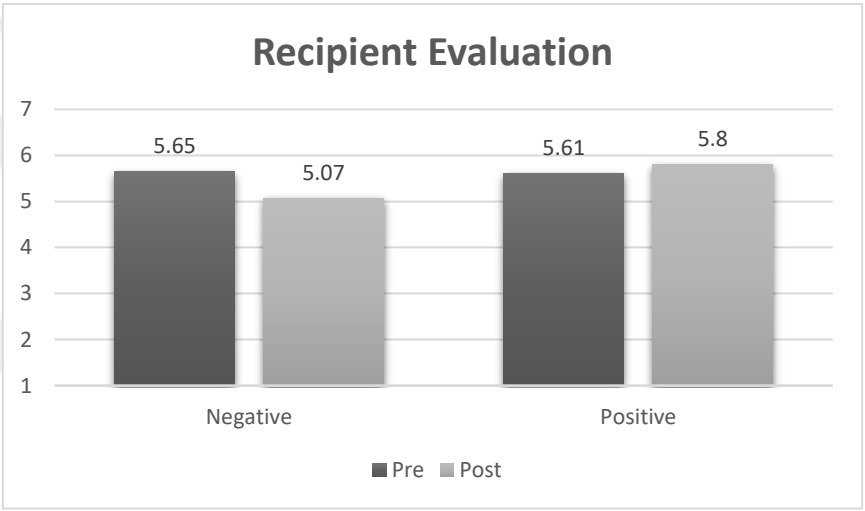

Figure 2.5: The effect of feedback on recipient evaluation (Study 2)

Product Evaluation. We run repeated-measures ANOVA using product evaluation (pre vs. post) as a within-subjects factor and feedback valence (negative vs. positive) as a between-subjects factor. Results revealed a significant effect for product evaluation, $F(1, 310) = 182.304$, $p< .001$, $\eta 2 = .370$. Contrast analyses indicated that after receiving negative feedback, participants evaluated the product less favorably compared to the pre-evaluation ($M_{pre\text{-}negative}= 7.8824$, $SD = 1.24177$; $M_{post\text{-}negative} = 5.3301$, $SD = 2.36000$), $p < .001$. In the positive feedback condition, the difference between post- and pre-evaluations of the product was also significant ($M_{pre\text{-}positive} = 7.8711$, $SD = 1.04672$, $M_{post\text{-}positive} = 8.1730$, $SD = 1.00786$), $p < .042$.

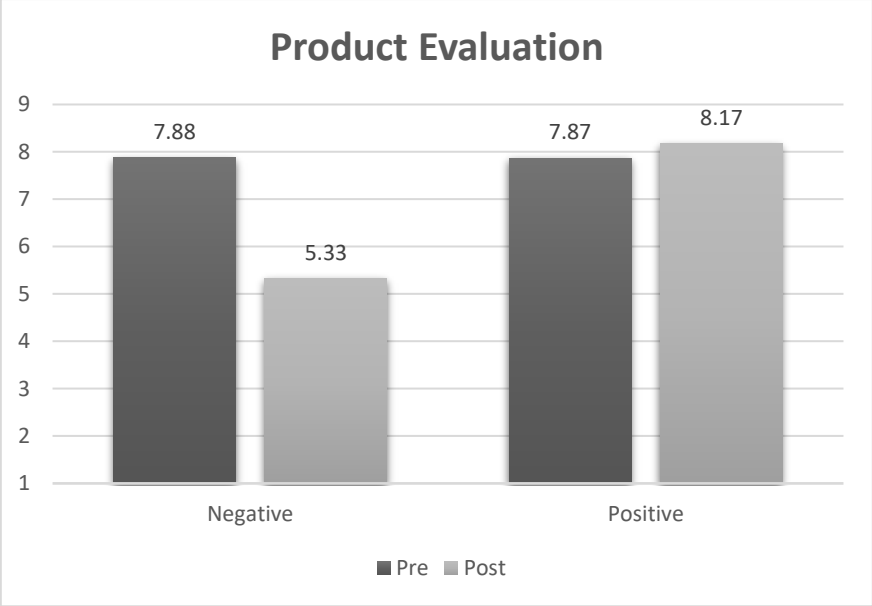

Figure 2.6: The effect of feedback on product evaluation (Study 2)

Discussion

Study 2 provided further support that feedback valence changes the evaluations of the product and the recipient. We found that negative feedback hurts the evaluations of the product and the recipient, while positive feedback increases the evaluations of both. Extant literature suggests that prior attitudes lead to a discounting of other people's advice and opinions (Yaniv and Kleinberger 2000). However, our findings show that even if consumers have prior evaluations of the product, they are still affected by other consumers' opinions in the recommendation-feedback context.

2.3.3 Study 3: Real Conversation

In this study, we wanted to replicate the results of Study 1 and Study 2 using a real conversation design. To do that, we provided a chat platform where participants can recommend a product and then receive feedback in real-time. The results of this study showed that receiving feedback affects the evaluations of the product and the recipient in a real-time conversation setting.

Method

Participants. One hundred and twenty participants were recruited from Prolific Academic in exchange for a small, fixed payment. We removed participants who failed to complete the study, failed the attention checks, did not match with the chat partner, and did not receive feedback. The final sample included ninety-five participants (40% women, median age=26 years).

Design. This study used a single factor between-subjects design (feedback: positive feedback vs. negative feedback). Participants imagined that they are working at a gaming company. They were presented with two games and asked to play each of these games and recommend one of them to a colleague. They were told that they will have a chat with the colleague after the colleague plays the game and they will receive feedback about the game.

During the chat part of the study, participants chatted with a confederate as a colleague and they were provided with feedback. Please see Appendix B for further details on the procedure.

Participants completed the same product evaluation scale (Spears and Singh 2004; $\alpha = .976$) and recipient evaluation scale (Fragale et al. 2009, Wiggins 1979; $\alpha = .908$) that are used in previous studies.

Results

Recipient Evaluation. The results of an ANOVA on the recipient evaluation showed a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 93) = 28.407$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .234$), with participants in the negative feedback condition providing significantly less positive evaluations of the recipient (Mnegative = 4.5188, SD = 1.18800) compared to those in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 5.6000, SD = .73069).

Product Evaluation. An ANOVA on the product evaluation revealed a main effect for feedback valence ($F(1, 93) = 19.334$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .172$). As predicted, product evaluations in the negative feedback condition were significantly less favorable (Mnegative = 4.6146, SD = 2.03229) than those in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 6.4255, SD = 1.98083).

Discussion

Study 3 further confirmed the effect, with the added advantage of being conducted in a real-time conversation setting that enhances the ecological validity of the findings. These findings suggest that receiving feedback plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' evaluations, regardless of whether the feedback is given in a naturalistic setting or not.

2.3.4 Study 4: Survey

The objective of this study is to examine consumers' recommendation and feedback dynamics in a real-life context and replicate the findings of previous studies using survey data. To accomplish this, participants were asked to recall a specific instance in which they made a recommendation and received feedback. By collecting this information, we aim to gain valuable insights into the recommendation and feedback processes as they occur in real-life incidences.

Method

Participants. Three hundred and forty participants were initially recruited from Prolific Academic, and they received a small, fixed payment in return for their participation. After excluding participants who did not complete the study, failed attention checks, or did not have any instances of recommendation and feedback, the final sample consisted of three hundred and fourteen participants (59.2% women, median age=38 years).

Design. This study employed a between-subjects design with a single factor, namely feedback (positive feedback vs. negative feedback). Participants were initially prompted to recall a recent incident in which they had recommended a product or service and subsequently received feedback on their recommendation. They were then asked to provide details about their recommendation, including what they specifically communicated during the recommendation process. Following that, participants described the feedback they received from another person regarding the product or service. Lastly, participants indicated whether the feedback they received was positive or negative.

After completing the task of writing recommendations and feedback, participants proceeded to complete two sets of scales. Firstly, they evaluated the recommended product

using the product evaluation scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004), which comprised two items assessing the brand's appeal and goodness on a nine-point scale (Cronbach's α = .979). Secondly, participants indicated their likelihood of making the same recommendation to others on a seven-point scale. Following the evaluations, participants were prompted to provide the product or service category as well as the brand name in written format.

Results

Self-Report Measure of Feedback Valence. Descriptive analysis revealed that out of the total sample, one hundred and fifty-nine participants received positive feedback, while one hundred and fifty-five participants received negative feedback.

Text Analysis Measure to Check Feedback Valence. To assess feedback valence, we employed the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (LIWC; Pennebaker et al. 2015) to analyze the open-ended responses. The descriptive analysis allowed us to examine whether participants who reported receiving positive (negative) feedback indeed received feedback with a higher positive (negative) tone compared to those who reported negative (positive) feedback. An ANOVA on the positive tone scores revealed a significant effect ($F(1, 312) = 148.272$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .322$). Specifically, positive feedback was associated with significantly higher positive tone ($M_{positive} = 9.0250$, $SD = 5.44973$) compared to negative feedback ($M_{negative} = 2.6326$, $SD = 3.65389$). Similarly, an ANOVA on the negative tone scores revealed a significant effect ($F(1, 312) = 85.023$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .214$). Participants who received negative feedback exhibited significantly higher negative tone ($M_{negative} = 3.8690$, $SD = 4.80882$) compared to those who received positive feedback ($M_{positive} = 0.2718$, $SD = 1.02367$).

Type of Offering. Participants were asked to provide the type of offering they recommended, which was subsequently coded as either an intangible (i.e., services) or a tangible (i.e., goods) product. The coding process revealed that out of the total sample, one hundred and thirty-seven participants made intangible product recommendations, while one hundred and seventy-seven participants made tangible product recommendations.

Product Evaluation. An ANOVA on the product evaluation revealed a main effect for feedback valence ($F(1, 312) = 124.626$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .285$). As predicted, product

evaluations in the negative feedback condition were significantly less favorable (Mnegative = 5.7645, SD = 2.44306) than those in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 8.0818, SD = .92756).

A significant interaction effect was found in the two-way ANOVA analysis ($F(1, 310) = 15.003$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .046$). Contrast analysis revealed that there is no significant difference ($F(1, 310) = .054$, $p = .817$, $\eta 2 = .000$) between intangible (Mpositive-intangible = 8.1230, SD = .96028) and tangible (Mpositive-tangible = 8.0561, SD = .91065) product recommendations when participants receive positive feedback. On the other hand, when participants received negative feedback, the services were evaluated as significantly less favorable (Mnegative-intangible = 5.0000, SD = 2.50067) than the tangible products (Mnegative-tangible = 6.5000, SD = 2.15728) ($F(1, 310) = 27.918$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .083$).

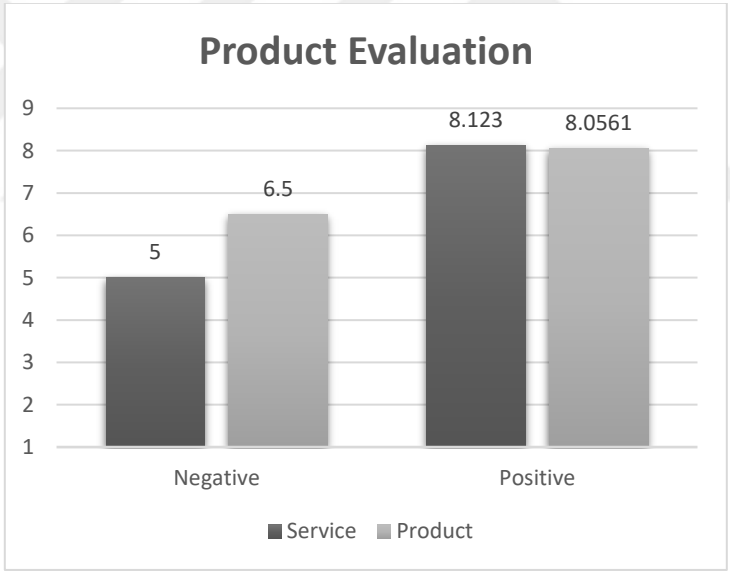

Figure 2.7: The effect of feedback on product evaluation (Study 4)

Subsequent Recommendation. An ANOVA on the subsequent recommendation revealed a main effect for feedback valence ($F(1, 312) = 185.749$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .373$). As predicted, subsequent recommendations in the negative feedback condition were significantly less likely (Mnegative = 4.08, SD = 2.092) than those in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 6.48, SD = .737).

A significant interaction effect was found in the two-way ANOVA analysis ($F(1, 310) = 10.721$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .033$). Contrast analysis revealed that there is no significant difference ($F(1, 310) = .076$, $p=.784$, $\eta 2 = .000$) between intangible ($M_{positive\text{-}intangible} = 6.44$, $SD = .719$) and tangible ($M_{positive\text{-}tangible} = 6.51$, $SD = .750$) product recommendations when participants receive positive feedback. On the other hand, when participants received negative feedback, the intangible products were less likely recommended again ($M_{negative\text{-}intangible} = 3.47$, $SD = 2.094$) than the tangible products ($M_{negative\text{-}tangible} = 4.67$, $SD = 1.926$) ($F(1, 310) = 24.450$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .073$).

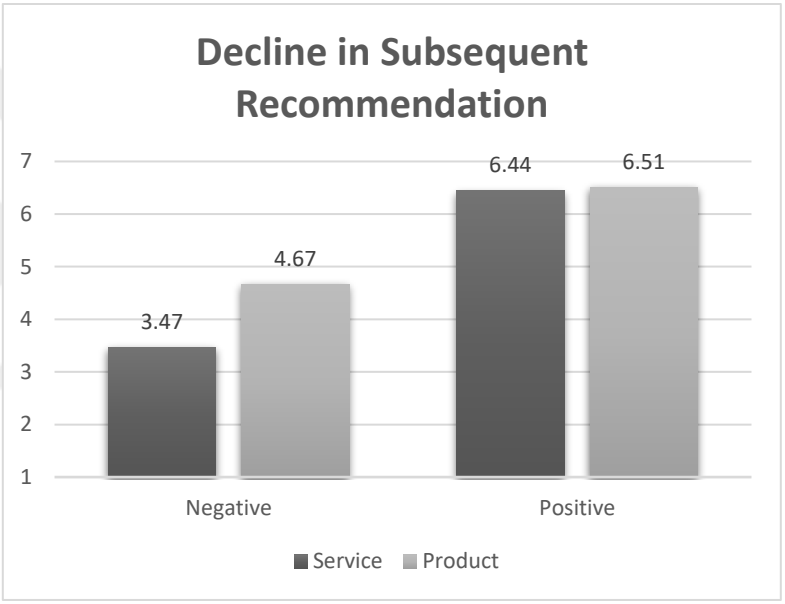

Figure 2.8: The effect of feedback on subsequent recommendation (Study 4)

Discussion

Study 4 offers compelling evidence that consumers in real-life settings engage in the process of making recommendations and receiving feedback, both positive and negative. The valence of the feedback has a significant impact on the evaluations of both tangible and intangible products. Specifically, our findings reveal that participants who received positive feedback provided similar evaluations for both tangible and intangible products; and expressed a similar likelihood of making the same recommendation again. In contrast, participants who received negative feedback evaluated services more negatively than

tangible products and exhibited a significantly lower intention to make the same recommendation again, particularly for intangible products like services.

2.3.5 Study 5: The Mediating Role of Perceived Similarity

In Study 5, we aim to replicate the feedback effect observed in previous research using a student sample in a lab experiment. Furthermore, we seek to examine the mediating role of perceived similarity in the feedback effect while ruling out alternative processes, such as mood and perceived threat.

Research suggests that perceived agreement between individuals tends to increase mutual liking, while disagreements tend to increase disliking (Eiser, Fazio, Stafford, and Prescott 2003; Insko, Sedlak, and Lipsitz 1982). In the context of product recommendations, the valence of the feedback may signal agreement or disagreement on consumption preferences, leading the recommender to infer similarity or dissimilarity with the recipient. If the recommender perceives agreement with the recipient's feedback, this may increase their liking of the recipient due to perceived similarities. Furthermore, the perceived similarity (or dissimilarity) between the recommender and recipient may affect the recommender's perception of the product, potentially leading to a realignment of their evaluation of it because the recommender may attribute responsibility to the product for the perceived similarity.

Alternative explanations such as mood and perceived threat may contribute to the observed effects on consumer evaluations. Previous research has indicated that consumer mood is an important factor that influences the judgments of both products and individuals. Studies by Gorn, Goldberg, and Basu (1993), Isen et al. (1978), Ottati and Isbell (1996), and Schwarz and Clore (1983) suggest that individuals' current moods can serve as the basis for their evaluations. When individuals are in a positive or negative mood state, they tend to evaluate the target brand more favorably or less favorably, respectively, compared to when they are in a neutral mood state (Herr, Sherman, and Fazio 1983). In addition, research has shown that consumers' perceived threat can significantly impact their product evaluations. Consumers who perceive a threat may lower their evaluations of the product (Dunn and Dahl 2012) or avoid it altogether (White and Argo 2009). However, we propose that perceived

similarity is the underlying mechanism driving the effect. To establish this, we will test all potential processes.

Method

Participants. Two hundred and thirty-six respondents from a European University participated in this study in exchange for course credit. We applied similar removal criteria of previous studies. We had two hundred and ten respondents (61% women, median age=22 years) as a final sample.

Design. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (feedback valence: positive feedback vs. negative feedback) x 1 between-subjects design.

In Study 5, the same feedback manipulation used in Study 1 was applied. Participants were instructed to imagine recommending a product to a colleague and receiving feedback. Following this, they were asked to complete a product evaluation scale, consisting of two items assessing the appeal and goodness of the product on a nine-point scale. This scale was adapted from the scale used by Spears and Singh (2004) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .930$). Additionally, participants evaluated the recipient using a ten-item scale measuring traits such as good-natured, sincere, and arrogant on a seven-point scale. It was adapted from scales used by Fragale et al. (2009) and Wiggins (1979) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .869$).

To assess participants' perception of similarity, a 7-point scale was used, with 1 representing "not at all similar to me," "not at all like me," and "nothing in common with me," while 7 represented "very much similar to me," "very much like me," and "very much in common with me" ($\alpha = .912$). This scale was adapted from Packard, Gershoff, and Wooten's (2016) work.

Next, participants' mood was assessed using the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS), which is a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) ($\alpha = .811$; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988). Following this, participants were asked to rate their level of perceived threat using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely) (Zhang, Li, and Ng, 2022).

As a manipulation check, we asked participants to evaluate the feedback valence on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 indicating negative feedback and 7 indicating positive feedback.

Results

Manipulation check. Our feedback valence manipulation was successful. The mean feedback valence was significantly higher in the positive feedback (Mpositive = 5.39, SD =1.358) than in the negative feedback (Mnegative = 2.89, SD = 1.263) condition $F(1, 208) = 191.531$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .479$).

Recipient Evaluation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, using feedback valence as the independent variable and recipient evaluation as the dependent variable. Results showed a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 208) = 175.523$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .458$). Participants evaluated the recipient less favorably in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 3.6759, SD = .71380) compared to the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 5.0127, SD = .74842).

Product Evaluation. An ANOVA was conducted with feedback valence as the independent variable and product evaluation as the dependent variable, which revealed a significant main effect ($F(1, 208) = 165.437$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .443$). The product received significantly lower evaluations in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 4.5741, SD = 1.76521) compared to the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 7.3039, SD = 1.25105).

Perceived Similarity. We conducted an ANOVA with feedback valence as the independent variable and perceived similarity as the dependent variable. The results showed a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 208) = 70.742$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .254$). Specifically, participants perceived lower similarity in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 3.3889, SD = 1.30857) than in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 4.8137, SD = 1.13410).

Mood. We analyzed the relationship between feedback valence and mood state using an ANOVA. The analysis did not reveal a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 208) = 3.723$, $p = .055$, $\eta 2 = .018$). This suggests that participants' mood states did not differ significantly between the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 4.4458, SD = .73979) and the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 4.6324, SD = .65547).

Perceived Threat. An ANOVA was performed to examine the relationship between feedback valence and perceived threat. The results did not show a significant main effect ($F(1, 208) = .527$, $p = .469$, $\eta 2 = .003$). Participants did not perceive significantly less threat in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 2.7407, SD = 1.68207) compared to the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 2.9020, SD = 1.52543).

Mediation effect of perceived similarity, mood, and perceived threat on recipient evaluation. To test whether the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation is driven by perceived similarity, mood, or perceived threat, we conducted a parallel mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; Model 4) through perceived similarity (feedback → perceived similarity → recipient evaluation), mood (feedback → mood → recipient evaluation), and perceived threat (feedback → perceived threat → recipient evaluation), with 2-level independent variables (positive vs. negative feedback). Regression coefficients appear in Figure 2.18. Results show that an indirect effect through perceived similarity accounted for the differences between the positive feedback and the negative feedback conditions (b = -.4720, 95% CI = -.6619, -.3106). By contrast, the mediation through mood (b = -.0031, 95% CI = -.0401, .0244) and perceived threat (b = .0084, 95% CI = -.0163, .0409) did not account for the difference between the positive feedback and the negative feedback. As predicted, feedback valence had a significant impact on perceived similarity, which mediated the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation. The competing hypotheses were not supported, as there was no significant effect of feedback valence on mood and perceived threat, and also mood and perceived threat did not impact on recipient evaluation.

Mediation effect of perceived similarity, mood, and perceived threat on product evaluation. We conducted a parallel mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; Model 4) to investigate whether perceived similarity, mood, or perceived threat mediated the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation. We used a 2-level independent variable (positive vs. negative feedback) and tested three mediation models: feedback → perceived similarity → product evaluation, feedback → mood → product evaluation, and feedback → perceived threat → product evaluation. The regression coefficients are displayed in Figure 2.20. The results revealed that the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation was significantly mediated by perceived similarity (b = -.6618, 95% CI = -1.0036, -.3776), but not by mood (b = .0082,

95% CI = -.0701, .0841) or perceived threat (b = -.0021, 95% CI = -.0478, .0418). These findings suggest that the differences in product evaluation between the positive and negative feedback conditions can be explained by changes in perceived similarity. As anticipated, the valence of feedback had a significant influence on perceived similarity, which in turn mediated the relationship between feedback valence and product evaluation. Contrary to the competing hypotheses, no significant effects of feedback valence were observed on mood and perceived threat.

Discussion

The results of Study 5 offer strong support for the impact of feedback valence on evaluations of both the product and the recipient, while also providing insight into the underlying mechanism at play. Our findings demonstrate that positive feedback leads to increased perceptions of similarity, while negative feedback leads to decreased perceptions of similarity. Moreover, we found that perceived similarity mediates the effect of feedback on evaluations of both the recipient and the product. These results offer compelling evidence for the importance of perceived similarity as a driver of consumer evaluations. Furthermore, we ruled out alternative explanations such as mood and perceived threat, indicating that the effect is specific to perceived similarity. Overall, the findings suggest that positive feedback can increase perceived similarity, leading to more favorable evaluations of both the recipient and the product, while negative feedback can decrease perceived similarity, leading to less favorable evaluations.

2.3.6 Study 6: Mediating Role of Perceived Similarity by Moderation

Study 6 was preregistered on AsPredicted.org with predefined expected effects, a detailed analysis plan, and predetermined exclusion criteria. The primary objective of this study was to offer empirical evidence supporting the mediating role of perceived similarity through moderation.

Furthermore, by manipulating similarity and measuring its effects on both the product and the recipient, our study reveals distinct impacts on each of these entities (recipient and product). This analysis indicates that the observed effects are not a halo effect stemming from a negative response.

Method

Participants. This study recruited four hundred and forty participants from Prolific Academic, who were offered a small, fixed payment for their participation. Pre-determined exclusion criteria, specified in the preregistration, were used to remove participants from the analysis. The final sample comprised four hundred and twenty-two participants (58.5% women, median age=37 years).

Design. Participants were randomly assigned to a 2 (feedback valence: positive feedback vs. negative feedback) x 2 (similarity with the recipient: similar vs. dissimilar) between-subjects design.

First, we manipulated the similarity between participants and their assigned recipients. We presented participants with four pairs of stimuli (colors, shapes, fonts, and paintings) and asked them to indicate their preferred options (Tuk et al. 2019; see Appendix B). We then informed participants that they were paired with another person whose choices were identical to theirs (the "similar" condition) or opposite to theirs (the "dissimilar" condition).

To manipulate feedback valence, we used a similar approach to that of Study 1. Participants were asked to imagine recommending a product to their paired partner and receiving feedback from them. After this, participants completed the same product evaluation scale used in Study 1, which included two items measuring product appeal and goodness (nine-point scale; $\alpha = .974$; Spears and Singh 2004). We also asked participants to evaluate the recipient's characteristics, such as being good-natured, sincere, or arrogant, using a ten-item scale (seven-point scale; Cronbach's $\alpha = .946$) derived from Fragale et al. (2009) and Wiggins (1979). To check the effectiveness of the feedback manipulation, participants were asked to evaluate the feedback valence on a scale ranging from 1 (negative) to 7 (positive).

Results

Manipulation check. The results of the manipulation check indicated that our feedback valence manipulation was successful. Specifically, a two-way ANOVA with full interaction was not significant ($F(1, 418) = 2.520$, $p=.113$, $\eta 2 = .006$), suggesting that there

was no significant interaction between feedback valence and similarity with the recipient. However, there was a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 420) = 1210.658$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .742$), indicating that the mean feedback valence was significantly higher in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 6.10$, $SD = .823$) than in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 2.44$, $SD = 1.288$).

Recipient Evaluation. A full factorial ANOVA on the recipient evaluation revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 418) = 6.422$, $p=.012$, $\eta 2 = .015$). Further analysis through contrast analysis showed that there was no significant difference ($F(1, 418) = 2.704$, $p =.101$, $\eta 2 = .006$) between the similar ($M_{positive\text{-}similar} = 5.5475$, $SD = .70450$) and dissimilar ($M_{positive\text{-}dissimilar} = 5.3642$, $SD = .76176$) conditions when recommenders received positive feedback. However, the recipient was evaluated as significantly more favorable in the similar condition ($M_{negative\text{-}similar} = 4.0084$, $SD = .82715$) than in the dissimilar condition ($M_{negative\text{-}dissimilar} = 3.4267$, $SD = .91728$) when recommenders received negative feedback ($F(1, 418) = 27.528$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .062$), providing support for our preregistered expectation.

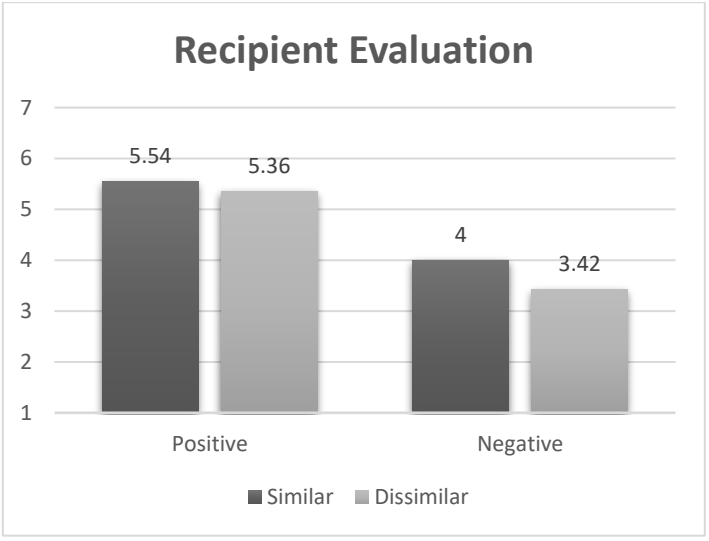

Figure 2.9: The interaction effect on recipient evaluation (comparison 1) (Study 6)

A full factorial ANOVA on the recipient evaluation revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 418) = 6.422$, $p = .012$, $\eta 2 = .015$). Further contrast analysis showed that when recommenders have high similarity with the recipient, they evaluate the recipient more favorably in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive\text{-}similar} = 5.5475$, $SD = .70450$) than in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative\text{-}similar} = 4.0084$, $SD = .82715$), with a significant difference ($F(1, 418) = 188.914$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .311$). Similarly, when recommenders have dissimilarity with the recipient, they evaluate the recipient more favorably in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive\text{-}dissimilar} = 5.3642$, $SD = .76176$) than in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative\text{-}dissimilar} = 3.4267$, $SD = .91728$), with a significant difference ($F(1, 418) = 308.170$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .424$).

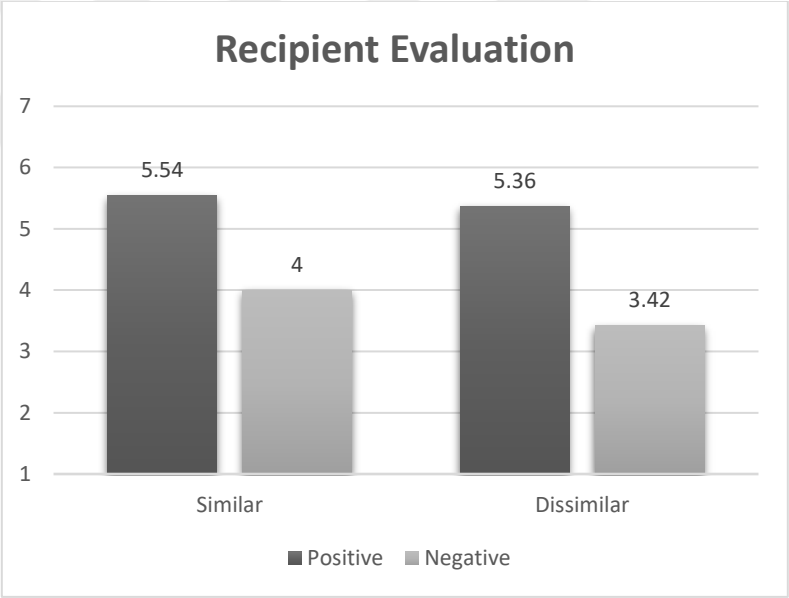

Figure 2.10: The interaction effect on recipient evaluation (comparison 2) (Study 6)

Product Evaluation. A significant interaction effect was found in the two-way ANOVA analysis ($F(1, 418) = 13.161$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .031$). Contrast analysis revealed that participants did not evaluate the product more positively ($F(1, 418) = .000$, $p =.997$, $\eta 2 = .000$) when they received positive feedback and were similar to the recipient ($M_{positive\text{-}similar} = 7.9257$, $SD = .87860$) compared to being dissimilar ($M_{positive\text{-}dissimilar} = 7.9266$,

SD = 1.01568). However, when participants received negative feedback, the product was evaluated as significantly less favorable in the similar condition (Mnegative-similar = 3.7243, SD = 1.99437) than in the dissimilar condition (Mnegative-dissimilar = 4.8857, SD = 2.22989) ($F(1, 418) = 26.505$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .060$).

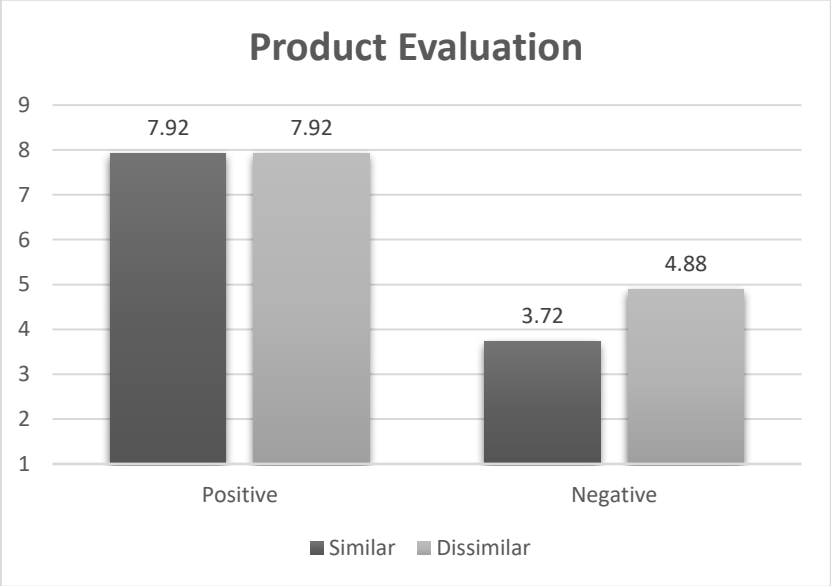

Figure 2.11: The interaction effect on product evaluation (comparison 1) (Study 6)

The results of a full factorial ANOVA on the product evaluation revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 418) = 13.161$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .031$). Further analysis using contrast analysis indicated that when recommenders had high similarity with the recipient, they evaluated the product more favorably in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive-similar = 7.9257, SD = .87860) than in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative-similar = 3.7243, SD = 1.99437), with a significant difference ($F(1, 418) = 340.060$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .449$). Additionally, when recommenders had dissimilarity with the recipient, they evaluated the product more favorably in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive-dissimilar = 7.9266, SD = 1.01568) than in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative-dissimilar = 4.8857, SD = 2.22989), with a significant difference ($F(1, 418) = 183.367$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .305$).

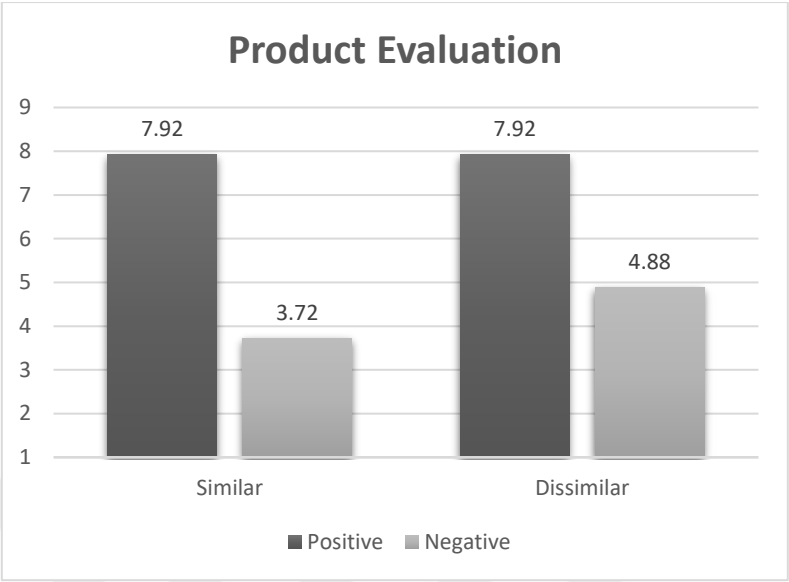

Figure 2.12: The interaction effect on product evaluation (comparison 2) (Study 6)

Discussion

In Study 6, the role of similarity was found to moderate the effect of feedback valence on both the recipient and the product evaluation. When recommenders received positive feedback, the level of similarity between them and the recipient did not have a significant impact on their evaluation of the product or the recipient. However, when the feedback was negative, the level of similarity between the recommender and the recipient was found to be important. Recommenders evaluated the product less favorably when the negative feedback came from a similar person compared to a dissimilar person. In contrast, similarity acted as a protective shield for recipient evaluations, as recommenders evaluated similar recipients more favorably than dissimilar ones. This asymmetry demonstrates that dissimilarity disassociates the influence of feedback on recommenders' evaluations.

2.3.7 Study 7: The Moderating Role of Product Commitment

Study 7 aims to investigate whether product commitment moderates the effect of perceived similarity on evaluations of both the recipient and the product.

Method

Participants. Five hundred and twenty participants were recruited from Prolific Academic in this study in exchange for monetary compensation. We applied similar removal criteria of previous studies. We had four hundred and sixty-six respondents (46.4% women, median age=36 years) as a final sample.

Design. Participants were randomly assigned to a 3 (feedback valence: positive feedback vs. negative feedback vs. no feedback) x 2 (product commitment: high commitment vs. low commitment) between-subjects design.

We first manipulated participants' product commitment by asking them to imagine using software for which they had either high or low commitment, using a multidimensional description adapted from previous research (Aaker et al. 2004; Rusbult et al. 1998; Zemack-Rugar et al. 2017; see Appendix B).

The feedback manipulation used in Study 1 was applied similarly in this study. Participants were asked to imagine recommending and receiving feedback from their colleagues. In addition, participants were asked to complete a product evaluation scale, consisting of two items measuring the appeal and goodness of the product on a nine-point scale, (α = .963), following the scale used by Spears and Singh (2004). They were also asked to evaluate the recipient using a ten-item scale (e.g., good-natured, sincere, arrogant) on a seven-point scale, (α = .894), adapted from Fragale et al. (2009) and Wiggins (1979).

Next, participants' perception of similarity was assessed using a 7-point scale (1=not at all similar to me/ not at all like me/nothing in common with me; 7= Very much similar to me/ Very much like me/ Very much in common with me; α = .936; Packard, Gershoff, and Wooten 2016).

As a manipulation check, we first asked participants to evaluate the feedback valence on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 indicating negative feedback and 7 indicating positive feedback. Second, we measured the manipulation check of the product commitment by asking participants to respond to two 7-point items derived from Zemack-Rugar et al. (2017): "I can see myself using this software in the long term" and "I would feel very upset if this software

stopped existing in the near future". Participants responded on a scale of 1 (Don't agree at all) to 8 (Agree completely), and the two items had a reliability coefficient of .925.

Results

Manipulation check valence. Our feedback valence manipulation was successful. Two-way ANOVA full interaction was not significant $F(2, 460) = 2.935$, p=.054 $\eta 2 = .013$. The mean feedback valence was significantly higher in the positive feedback (Mpositive = 6.0194, SD =.87883) than in the negative feedback (Mnegative = 2.2941, SD =1.19694) condition $F(1, 306) = 971.069$, p<.001, $\eta 2 = .760$).

Manipulation check of product commitment. Our brand commitment manipulation was effective. Two-way ANOVA full interaction was not significant F(2, 460) = .094, p=.911, $\eta 2 = .000$. The mean brand commitment was significantly higher in the high commitment (Mhigh = 7.1444, SD =.96230) than in the low commitment (Mlow = 3.2115, SD =1.32373) condition F(1, 464) = 1343.781, p<.001, $\eta 2 = .743$).

Recipient Evaluation. A full factorial ANOVA on the recipient evaluation revealed a significant interaction effect (F(2, 460) = 14.572, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .060$). Contrast analysis showed that participants who were highly committed evaluated the recipient more positively in the positive feedback condition (Mhigh-positive = 5.4855, SD = .82101) than in the control condition (Mhigh-control = 4.8558, SD = .71828), indicating a significant effect (F(1, 460) = 25.906, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .053$). The recipient was evaluated less favorably in the negative feedback condition (Mhigh-negative = 3.8975, SD = .82103) than in the control condition (F(1, 460) = 61.180, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .117$) or in the positive feedback condition (F(1, 460) = 5825.525, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .266$).

If participants had a low commitment, there was no significant difference in the evaluation of the recipient between the positive feedback condition (Mlow-positive = 4.9329, SD = .71445) and the control condition (Mlow-control = 4.7852, SD = .75085), F(1, 460) = 1.491, p =.223, $\eta 2 = .003$. However, the recipient was evaluated as significantly less positive in the negative feedback condition (Mlow-negative = 4.2865, SD = .75875) than in the control condition, F(1, 460) = 16.429, p <.001, $\eta 2 = .034$, or in the positive feedback condition, F(1, 460) = 27.274, p<.001, $\eta 2 = .056$.

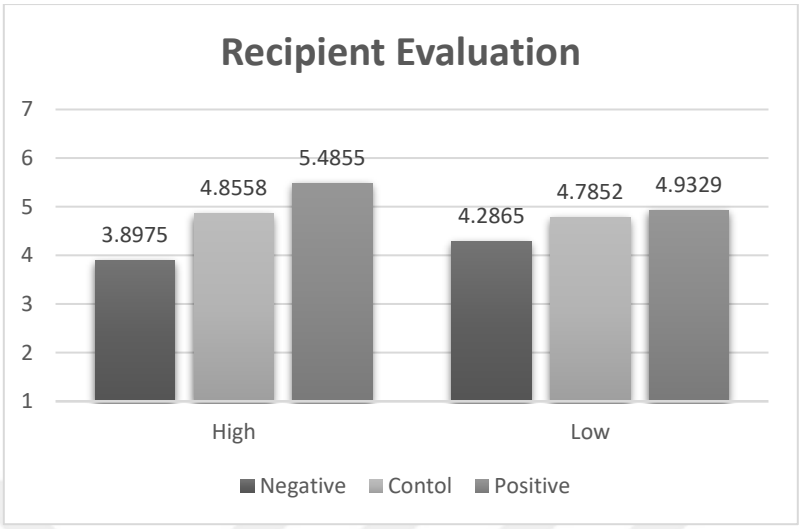

Figure 2.13: The interaction effect of feedback and product commitment on recipient evaluation (Study 7)

Product Evaluation. A two-way ANOVA with a full interaction effect was found to be significant ($F(2, 460) = 6.765$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .029$). Further analysis using contrast showed that if participants were highly committed to the product, they did not evaluate the product more positively in the positive feedback condition ($M_{high\text{-}positive} = 8.2039$, $SD = 1.12895$) compared to when they did not receive feedback ($M_{high\text{-}control} = 7.8052$, $SD = 1.25435$) ($F(1, 460) = 2.495$, $p = .115$, $\eta 2 = .005$). However, the product was evaluated significantly less favorably in the negative feedback condition ($M_{high\text{-}negative} = 5.3734$, $SD = 2.15797$) compared to the control condition ($F(1, 460) = 94.607$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .171$) or the positive feedback condition ($F(1, 460) = 2929.696$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .217$).

When participants had a low commitment, they rated the product more positively in the positive feedback condition ($M_{low\text{-}positive} = 6.5506$, $SD = 1.58032$) compared to the control condition ($M_{low\text{-}control} = 5.4506$, $SD = 1.43528$) ($F(1, 460) = 19.855$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .041$). The product received significantly lower evaluations in the negative feedback condition ($M_{low\text{-}negative} = 2.4122$, $SD = 1.58408$) compared to both the control condition ($F(1, 460) = 146.478$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .242$) and the positive feedback condition ($F(1, 460) = 268.491$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .369$).

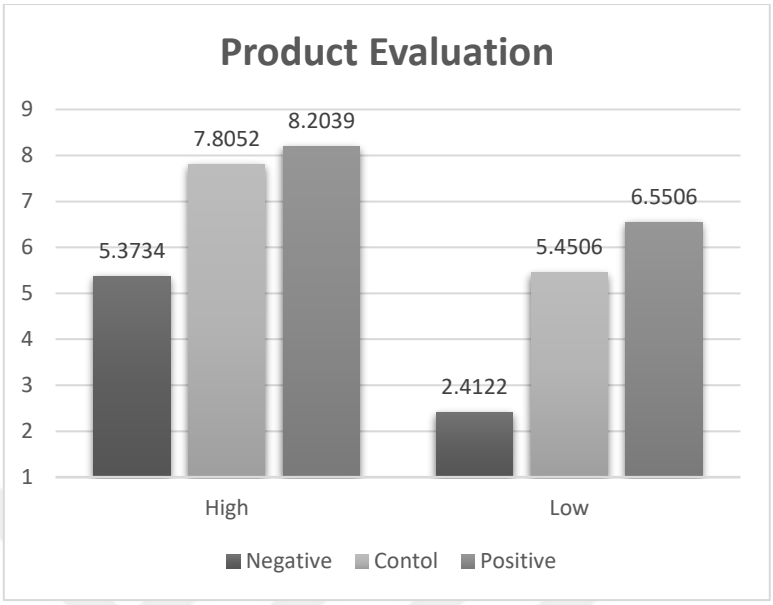

Figure 2.14: The interaction effect of feedback and product commitment on product evaluation (Study 7)

Perceived Similarity. Two-way ANOVA full interaction was found to be significant ($F(2, 460) = 35.719$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .134$). Contrast analysis indicated that in the presence of high product commitment, participants perceived more similarity in the positive feedback condition ($M_{high\text{-}positive} = 5.4298$, $SD = 1.00195$) than in the control condition ($M_{high\text{-}control} = 4.7273$, $SD = .83548$), and this difference was significant ($F(1, 460) = 17.797$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .037$). On the other hand, when the product commitment was high, participants perceived less similarity in the negative feedback condition ($M_{high\text{-}negative} = 2.9156$, $SD = .97617$) than in the control condition ($F(1, 460) = 120.649$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .208$), or in the positive feedback condition ($F(1, 460) = 2543.220$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .334$).

For participants with low product commitment, there was no significant difference in perceived similarity between the positive feedback ($M_{low\text{-}positive} = 4.3418$, $SD = 1.21479$) and control conditions ($M_{low\text{-}control} = 4.4074$, $SD = 1.00554$), as indicated by the non-significant F-value ($F(1, 460) = .162$, $p = .687$, $\eta 2 = .000$). However, participants perceived less similarity in the negative feedback condition ($M_{low\text{-}negative} = 3.7973$, $SD = 1.10598$) compared to the control condition ($F(1, 460) = 13.570$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .029$), as well as in the positive feedback condition ($F(1, 460) = 10.678$, $p = 001$, $\eta 2 = .023$).

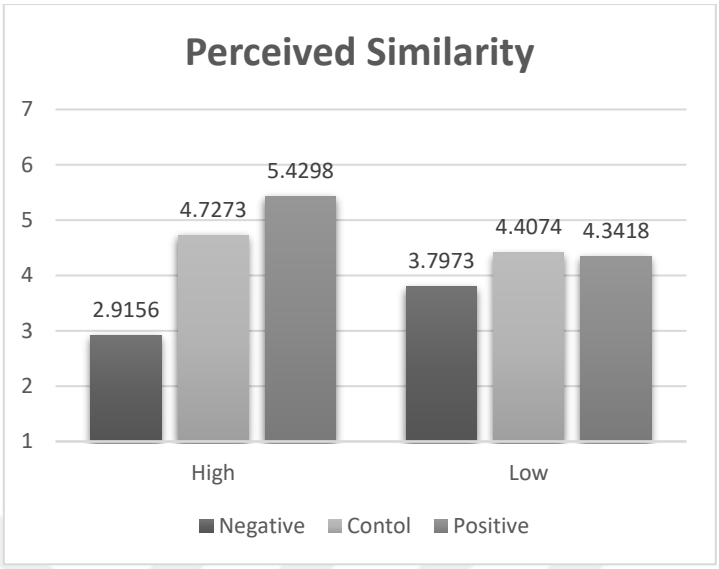

Figure 2.15: The interaction effect of feedback and product commitment on perceived similarity (Study 7)

Moderated mediation perceived similarity on recipient evaluation. We conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Hayes 2013, model 14, Figure 2.16) to examine whether the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation was mediated by perceived similarity, and whether the mediating path was moderated by product commitment. We focused on comparing the control condition to the positive feedback condition and the control condition to the negative feedback condition, coding the control condition as 0, the positive feedback condition as 1, and the negative feedback condition as 2. The index of moderated mediation was significant when comparing the control condition to the positive feedback condition (b=-.0436, 95% CI=-.1212, -.0011; see Figure 16 for complete path coefficients).

These findings suggest that positive feedback (negative feedback), compared to no feedback, results in higher (lower) perceived similarity, and the mediating role of perceived similarity on recipient evaluation is stronger when product commitment is high than when it is low.

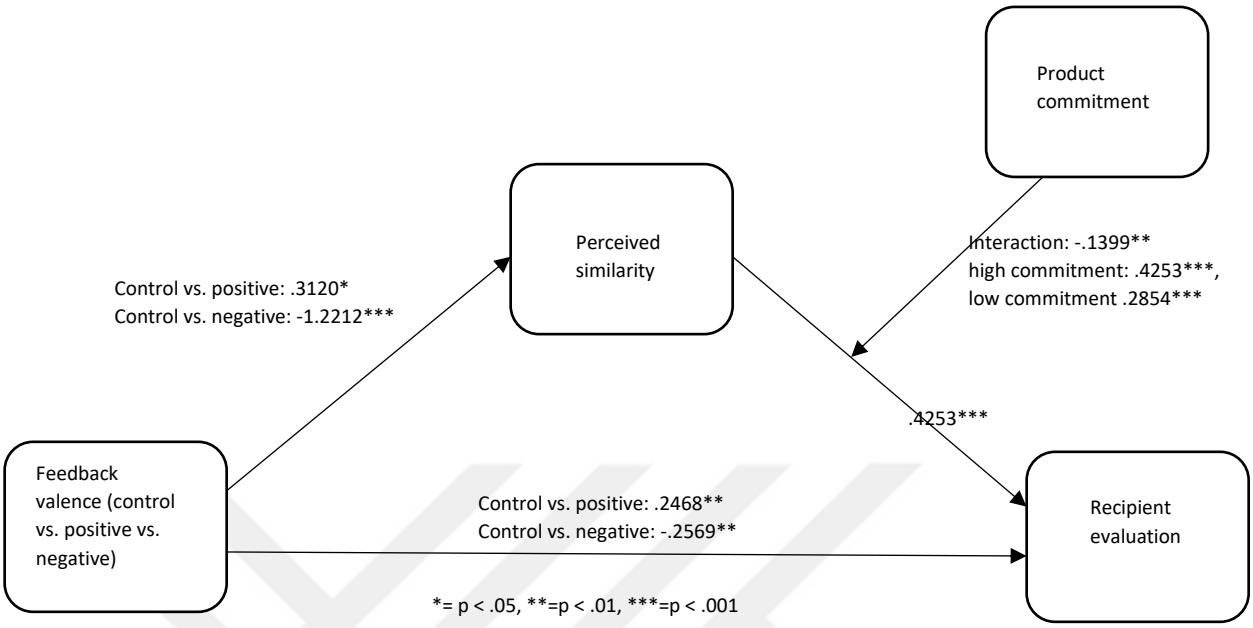

Figure 2.16: Moderated mediation on recipient evaluation: control as a reference group (Study 7)

Moderated mediation perceived similarity on product evaluation. We conducted moderated mediation analyses to examine whether product commitment moderates the effect of perceived similarity, which mediates the impact of feedback valence on product evaluation (Hayes 2013, model 14, Figure 2.17). We first focused on comparing the no feedback condition to the positive feedback condition. The index of moderated mediation was significant (b=.1107, 95% CI=.0111, .2530). High product commitment did not moderate the mediation effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation. However, when product commitment was high, we found a significant moderation effect on the relationship between perceived similarity and product evaluation. Second, we compared the no feedback condition to the negative feedback condition and found a significant moderated mediation index. While high commitment did not moderate the mediation effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation, low commitment moderated the effect.

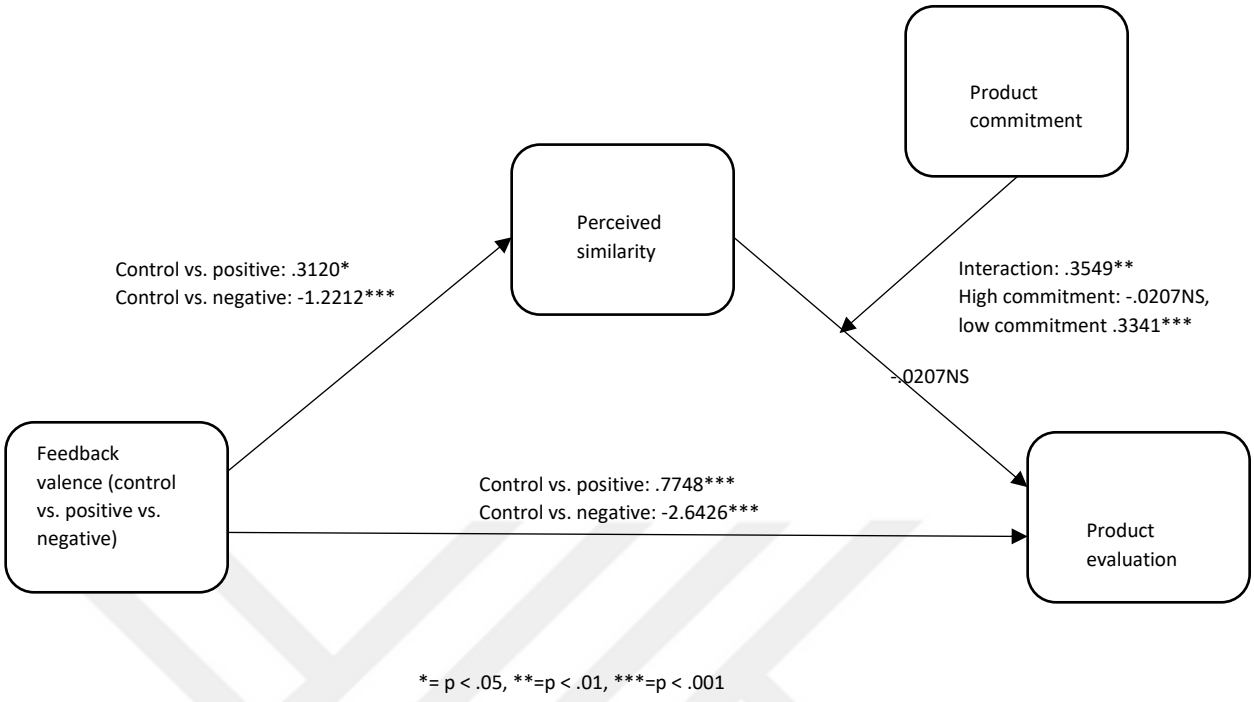

Figure 2.17: Moderated mediation on product evaluation: control as a reference group (Study 7)

Discussion

Study 7 provides evidence of moderation by product commitment. The results show that compared to the no feedback or negative feedback condition, when recommenders receive positive feedback and high product commitment, the mediating effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation disappears. Conversely, when recommenders receive positive feedback and have low product commitment, they perceive greater similarity than in the control or negative feedback conditions. These results suggest that positive feedback influences similarity perception, which leads to more favorable product evaluations only if recommenders have low product commitment.

When recommenders receive positive feedback, they perceive higher similarity, which leads them to evaluate the recipient more favorably, and this effect is stronger when recommenders have high product commitment.

The results suggest that low product commitment is beneficial for product evaluation, while high commitment is beneficial for recipient evaluation if the feedback is positive. When there is negative feedback, the evaluations of the product and the recipient are evaluated less favorably regardless of the level of commitment.

2.4 General Discussion

2.4.1 Summary of Findings

In our empirical analysis, we conducted seven studies. Study 1 provides evidence that recommenders adjust their evaluations of both the recipient and the recommended product upon receiving feedback, supporting H1 and H3. We show that these effects exhibit themselves when (i) we control for the potential influence of prior evaluations of the product and the recipient (Study 2), (ii) feedback is provided in a real conversation setting (Study 3), and (iii) consumers' real life experiences are examined through a survey (Study 4). We show that the effect is mediated by the perceived similarity between the recommender and the product, supporting H2 and H4 (Study 5). Lastly, product commitment moderates the impact of perceived similarity on evaluations of both the recipient and the product, supporting H5 and H6.

2.4.2 Theoretical Contributions

One of the most addressed research topics in the "word-of-mouth" (WOM) literature has been product recommendations. A large number of studies explicitly include a recommendation in their conceptualization of WOM (e.g. Brown et al. 2005; Danaher and Rust 1996; Duhan et al. 1997; File, Judd, and Prince 1992; Gremler and Brown 1999; Hartline and Jones 1996; Johnson, Zinkhan, and Ayala 1998; Maxham and Netemeyer 2002; Niu and Messinger 2011; Stokes, Syed, and Lomax 2002). Accordingly, extant research has developed a profound understanding on what drives product recommendations (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Van der Lans et al. 2010; Zhang, Feick, and Mittal 2014), why recipients seek recommendations (Dabholkar 2006, Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2003), and how recommendation influences recipients' buying behavior (e.g., Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Söderlund and Rosengren 2007; Trusov, Bucklin, and Pauwels 2009; Wangenheim and

Bayón 2007). Notably understudied within this growing body of WOM literature is the consequences of product-related conversations for the recommender (see Moore 2012; Shen and Sengupta 2018 for exceptions).

The present study advances the understanding of consequences for the recommender in several ways. First, it highlights that consumers' exchange of information on products may involve more than just recommendations; the dialogue can continue after adopting the recommendation. By introducing the concept of "feedback" to the existing notions of product recommendation and resulting consumer response, we develop a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of consumers' exchange of information on products. Second, by utilizing the similarity attraction theory, we develop a model that explains how recommenders change their evaluations in response to feedback by perceiving similarity with the recipient. Third, it highlights the role of product commitment by demonstrating that low product commitment diminishes the effect on recipient evaluation, whereas high product commitment does so for product evaluation.

Our results reveal that recommenders simultaneously adjust both their evaluations of the recipient and the product in response to feedback. Notably, this finding is in line with Balance Theory (Heider 1946, 1958), which proposes that people adjust their evaluations to maintain cognitive consistency within a triad involving the self, object, and another person. This theory provides a useful framework for studying various marketing relationships, such as those among employer-salesperson-customer (Homburg and Stock 2005), manufacturer-dealer-customer (Phillips, Lin, and Costello 1998), and audiences' attitudes towards nature in response to ecologic products' advertising slogans (Manrai, Manrai, Lascu, and Ryans 1997). We extend the existing knowledge about the applications of this theory as previous research has shown that only one relationship (self-object, self-other, or other-object) is adjusted to maintain cognitive consistency within the triad. Our study challenges this stance by revealing that two relationships could be adjusted simultaneously in the context of feedback.

2.4.3 Managerial Implications

A recent survey by Nielsen found that 82% of American consumers seek recommendations from friends when they have to make a choice among alternatives and 62% are more likely to make a purchase based on these recommendations (Kapadia 2016). Having realized that brand and product recommendations are vital to their success, several companies focus on creating products and services that are easily recommendable. For example, Spotify makes it very easy for consumers to see what songs their friends are listening to and suggests playlists that consist of songs recommended by their friends. Netflix offers social sharing features that help consumers share their favorite movies and TV shows with their friends. In addition, companies feel the need to influence what their customers are saying both online and offline about their product or service. They invest heavily in offering incentives and opportunities to consumers for recommending their products to others (Van der Lans et al. 2010). For example, ride service companies like Uber, Lyft, and Zipcar offer referral programs that allow consumers to earn free rides when they invite their friends to try apps of such services. Booking service companies like Airbnb and Hotel Tonight offer credits to encourage referrals. Tesla, an electric car company, offers rewards that include invitations to an exclusive party or the opportunity to buy a limited-edition product that is not available to the public.

Given the investments made in product recommendations, investigation of feedback effects on recommender's attitudes and behavior provides valuable implications for marketing managers. With a better understanding of the effects of feedback on subsequent product evaluations, companies can better predict the course of their relationships with innovators, influencers, and brand ambassadors. Furthermore, the identification of factors that influence the effects of feedback on recommenders' attitudes toward brands could help companies design more effective referral programs. Several digital services companies such as Netflix or Spotify provide feedback to users on their previous recommendations (i.e., how recommended movies or songs are rated by others). Such companies can make more informed decisions on how to customize and adjust the content of feedback to strengthen the positive consequences of positive feedback or alleviate the undesired consequences of negative feedback.

2.4.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study is subject to a number of limitations and extensions. First, we focus on feedback on direct recommendations of products. There are several other forms of word-of-mouth. For example, Berger (2014) argues that these forms include product-related discussions (e.g., information on attributes of a product as in "the acting in this movie was very good"), sharing product-related content (e.g., sharing a commercial of a brand), direct recommendations (e.g., you should watch this movie), and mere mentions (e.g., we watched this movie yesterday). Future research could extend the present study by focusing on recipients' feedback on other forms of communication (e.g., what happens when a recommender shares information on a particular attribute of a product and a recipient rejects it?).

Our study focuses on positive product recommendations. However, product recommendations could also be negative, such as "You shouldn't go to that restaurant" or "Do not watch this movie." Therefore, future research could explore whether recommenders' responses to feedback on negative recommendations differ from those on positive recommendations. In addition, while our study focuses solely on the valence of the feedback (whether it was positive or negative), future research could explore the influence of feedback content on the evaluations of the product and the recipient. For instance, examining whether feedback that is focused on the person or the product could have a different effect on the recommender's evaluations could provide valuable insights into the mechanisms underlying the feedback effects.

Regarding our empirical analysis, it should be noted that we employed a survey in Study 4. While the study aims to examine the impact of feedback valence using real-life incidences, it's important to acknowledge that the survey-based approach may introduce certain limitations. Specifically, the lack of randomization in the survey design might lead to potential endogeneity issues. To address this concern, future research could consider the inclusion of control variables, such as product commitment or the recommender's motivation to provide feedback, in order to mitigate potential endogeneity biases.

In our study, we demonstrated the role of perceived similarity as a mediator. In doing so, we considered and eliminated two alternative processes that could mediate the effect, namely mood and perceived threat. However, there could be additional processes to explore, such as the diagnosticity of the information provided. Future research could account for additional alternative explanations for the observed main effects of feedback valence on recommenders' evaluations.

Future research could also examine additional moderators. For example, feedback could differ in terms of visibility, such that feedback could be public (i.e., visible to others) or private (i.e., invisible to others). When feedback is public, the recommender may want to develop or maintain a positive self-image. Accordingly, public success leads to greater enjoyment than private success (Frey 1978). A public failure, on the other hand, has more severe consequences than a private failure as the individual can face social rejection (Bramel 1968). Of particular relevance to public vs. visible distinction, Barasch and Berger (2014) make a distinction between "broadcasting" – communications which involve more than one party-, and "narrowcasting" – talking to a single person. They argue that when broadcasting, communicators have a heightened other-focus as focusing on specific others decreases egocentric biases. Along similar lines, we can expect recommenders to have greater other-focus when feedback is private, that is they will be more concerned with the experience of the other. In the public feedback condition, they will focus more on their public image and the information revealed by feedback will be more personal. Given the more egocentric nature of private feedback, the recommender may display a self- serving bias in response to private feedback. Individuals tend to take credit for personal success but attribute failures to other factors (Campbell and Sedikides 1999) and deny responsibility for the negative outcome (e.g., Schlenker 1975a; Wolosin, Sherman, and Till 1973). Through this mechanism, people can enhance or protect their self-esteem. Negative personal information endangers individual's sense of personal worth Cohen, Aronson, and Steele (2000) and people tend to distort or dismiss self-threatening information (Pyszczynski and Greenberg 1987; Shepperd, Malone, and Sweeny 2008). Accordingly, they will attribute the negative outcome to other factors: the recipient and the brand. Therefore' when feedback is public, the effect of negative (positive) feedback on attitudes toward the product and the recipient may be stronger (weaker).

Another moderator could be the solicitation of feedback. Solicitation of feedback - whether feedback is sought after or not- can be an important element of the communication between the recommender and the recipient. As feedback reduces uncertainty - either about how one's actions are evaluated by others, or whether such actions are appropriate for achieving a goal (Ashford and Cummings 1983)- individuals may actively seek it rather than wait for it. (Morrison 1993). In such cases, individuals feel greater stress due to uncertainty and worry that they may become less respected by others (Ashford 1988). Besides, the information revealed by feedback is less likely to be disregarded (Ashford et al. 2003), unlike unsolicited feedback which is readily discounted (Roberson et al. 2003). Consistent with the arguments above, we may expect the recommender's attitudes to be more responsive to solicited feedback for two reasons. First, given the more severe consequences of sought-after feedback – such as greater discomfort or pleasantness-, the pressure for attitudinal alignment is greater. Second, the recommender processes solicited feedback more deliberately than unsolicited feedback and does not discount it. Therefore, we may expect solicited feedback to have more impact than unsolicited feedback. Of particular relevance to this prediction, Bansal and Voyer (2002) and East et al. (2005) found that solicited recommendations have more impact than unsolicited recommendations on recipient's behavior.

Considerable research has shown the notable impact of financial incentives, indicating that elevated rewards may lead to a greater volume of referrals (Ahrens et al. 2013; Wolters, Schulze, and Gedenk 2020). Nevertheless, the implementation of monetary rewards could potentially conflict with consumers' aspirations for self-enhancement and give rise to social concerns. Consequently, this could diminish the probability of customers engaging in referrals (Jin and Huang 2014). The inclusion of financial incentives in feedback mechanisms could also impact the effect of feedback valence on the evaluation of both the recipient and the product. In situations where feedback is tied to financial rewards, recommenders might prioritize the attainment of monetary gain over the positive outcomes of their recommendations for others. Consequently, the impact of feedback could be diluted when financial incentives are in play. Exploring the influence of financially incentivized referral programs on the dynamics of feedback's effect on product recommendations could serve as a promising avenue for future empirical research.

Finally, future research could examine the effects of feedback and recommendation on other dependent variables, such as how recommenders evaluate themselves and how they modify their subsequent recommendation behavior. Such inquiries would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of feedback and recommendations on consumer behavior.

2.5 Data Collection Information

Participants for Study 1, 2, and 3 were recruited from Prolific Academic in 2021. Participants of Study 7 were recruited from Prolific Academic in 2022. Participants for Study 4 and 6 were recruited from Prolific Academic in 2023. Data for Study 5 was collected in 2023 at a European University and participants were recruited among students.

Chapter 3

3. THE EFFECT OF FEEDBACK CONTENT ON RECOMMENDERS' EVALUATIONS

3.1 Introduction

Highlighting the importance of feedback, the previous chapter explored how recommenders update their evaluations of the product and the recipient in response to the valence of feedback (i.e., whether the feedback is positive or negative). However, there could be other cues embedded in the feedback that can offer recommenders a more profound understanding of the recipient's experience. For example, consider a scenario where a colleague states, "I don't like the software you recommended because I couldn't use it correctly". This type of feedback is user-focused, as it emphasizes personal attributes and experiences. Alternatively, feedback can also be product-focused, with the emphasis placed on the attributes and features of the product itself. For example, someone might express, "I liked the restaurant you recommended because the service and location were exceptional."

This chapter examines whether such subtle differences in feedback content influence how recommenders attribute the outcome of the product recommendation and how they update their evaluations of the recipient. By doing so, we contribute to various research streams in marketing. First, the extant literature on linguistics extensively examines the impact of linguistic factors on consumer behavior, exploring various linguistic aspects such as syntax (Ostinelli and Luna 2021), word choices (Fahnestock 2011; Goffman 1981; Gordon, Grosz, and Gilliom 1993; Mayer and Tormala 2010; Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010), voice construction (Chan and Maglio 2020; Henley et al. 1995), and subtle differences in wording (Meyers-Levy and Peracchio 1996; Packard, Moore, and McFerran 2018; Patrick and Hagtvedt 2012). We extend this linguistic exploration to the realm of product recommendations by focusing on linguistic aspects of feedback.

Second, the word-of-mouth literature investigates various forms of information exchange about products and services, with product recommendations being the center of attention (Berger 2014; Duhan et al. 1997; Westbrook 1987). We contribute to a better understanding of product recommendations by exploring how the nuanced aspects of feedback content influence the consequences for recommenders.

Third, our exploration offers profound insights into the attribution literature. Attribution theory, which concerns the mechanisms underlying individuals' interpretations and attributions of causality to events, constitutes a central concept in understanding consumer behavior. The attribution literature has extensively examined how people make attributions and what influences such attributions (Tsiros, Mittal, and Ross 2004; Weiner 2000; Folkes and Kotsos 1986; Krishnan and Valle 1979; Richins 1983; Valle and Wallendorf 1977). We offer an exploration of how recommenders attribute the outcome of the recommendation by relying on cues embedded in the feedback.

Finally, our study contributes to the literature on self-promotion. Existing studies in this field have primarily focused on the negative consequences of self-promoting communications, such as the creation of adverse impressions (Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986) and increased susceptibility to unfavorable perceptions (Holtgraves et al. 1989; Powers and Zuroff 1988). We enrich this line of research by demonstrating how altering the content of feedback in product recommendations could enhance the positive perception of the self in the eyes of others.

3.2 Theoretical Background

3.2.1 The Role of Linguistic Style in Consumer Research

The significance of linguistic style within consumer behavior has been deeply examined and established in numerous studies (Berger and Packard 2023). These investigations have revealed that even minor linguistic cues can heighten an individual's motivation to attentively process messages (McQuarrie and Mick 2003; Meyers-Levy and Peracchio 1996; Petty et al. 2008), and affect perceptions of both the speaker and the listener (Maass, Milesi, Zabbini, and Stahlberg 1995; Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, and Semin 1989). Past research has also delivered detailed analysis on how slight variations in wording can

significantly alter the effectiveness of persuasion (e.g., Meyers-Levy and Peracchio 1996; Packard, Moore, and McFerran 2018; Patrick and Hagtvedt 2012). Additionally, studies have shed light on the implications of utilizing diverse linguistic strategies, such as symbols, rhetorical figures, or differing tenses (e.g., Ahluwalia and Burnkrant 2004; Yorkston and Menon 2004). For example, Packard et al. (2018) demonstrated that when company representatives use "I" instead of "we", it amplifies customers' belief in the representative's empathy and advocacy. This in turn enhances customer satisfaction, purchase intentions, and actual buying behavior. Conversely, addressing customers with "you" doesn't significantly impact these outcomes and may sometimes lead to adverse effects. Similarly, Patrick and Hagtvedt's (2012) research probed into a specific aspect of self-talk linguistics, showing that framing a refusal as "I don't" versus "I can't" can strengthen resistance against temptations and stimulate goal-oriented behaviors.

The realm of Word of Mouth (WOM) literature is rich with research that delves into the linguistic aspects of communication. For instance, Lafreniere et al. (2022) examined the use of swear words in reviews and intriguingly found that such reviews were perceived as more insightful. Additionally, linguistic style plays a vital role in persuasive communication. Packard et al. (2023) revealed that when communicators express their views and experiences in the present tense rather than the past tense, it signals a higher level of confidence, leading to increased persuasiveness. Furthermore, research demonstrates that reviews written in a narrative style captivate readers more effectively, prompting deeper consideration of the message and subsequently influencing their behavioral intentions (Hamby et al. 2015). Language use also affects persuasion; for instance, when experts express uncertainty or novices convey certainty in their recommendations, they become more persuasive by encouraging greater attention and thorough consideration (Karmarkar and Tormala 2010). Notably, Schindler and Bickart (2012) discovered that reviews containing non-evaluative product information and information about the reviewer tend to be perceived as helpful, highlighting the relevance of linguistic cues in shaping the perception of helpfulness in reviews.

Word selection, specifically the use of pronouns such as "I", "it", "you", and "we", is a vital facet of linguistic style. Pronouns hold a pivotal role in directing focus, highlighting

priorities (Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010), and steering listeners' attention (Fahnestock 2011; Gordon, Grosz, and Gilliom 1993). Beyond this, the choice of pronouns can shape the manner in which listeners assimilate information. For example, using the pronoun "I" can invoke self-referencing (self-focus), connecting the information to the self. This not only stimulates deeper message exploration but also bolsters the potency of persuasive arguments (Burnkrant and Unnava 1989). Self-referencing further bolsters the recall of the message (Bellezza 1984; Brown, Keenan, and Potts 1986; Klein and Loftus 1988; Rogers, Kuiper, and Kirker 1977). A comprehensive understanding of how specific word choices, especially the use of pronouns, can influence consumer behavior, decision-making processes, and reactions to persuasive communication provides valuable insights into the impactful role of linguistic style.

Using pronouns such as “it” could be used as an instrument for product referencing (product-focus). Recent research has focused on examining the impact of syntax and product-referencing (product-focused) on product evaluation (Ostinelli and Luna 2021). For instance, it has been found that when the product user is the subject of a sentence (as opposed to the product itself), readers tend to evaluate the product more favorably. Building upon this view, our study delves into how recommender evaluations vary based on different content focuses (user vs. product), such as product-focused or user-focused feedback. We propose that exposure to feedback with varying content, whether product or user-focused, triggers recommenders to make attributions towards the product or recipient, in turn influencing their subsequent evaluations. In the following sections, we will discuss the interplay between feedback content and self-presentation and attribution by delving into the literature on self-presentation and attribution theories.

3.2.2 Self-Presentation

Self-presentation, as defined by Schlenker (2003), is any behavior enacted with the intention of shaping how others perceive oneself. A prevalent strategy to construct a positive self-presentation involves the verbal transmission of self-praising information, a practice also known as bragging (Berman et al. 2015). Yet, such self-bragging communication can often backfire, leading to a negative perception of the self-promoter (Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986). This is demonstrated in the research by Godfrey et al. (1986) which found self-

promoters to be less likable when compared to ingratiators. Additionally, Holtgraves et al. (1989) noted that when an individual used a conversation merely as a platform for self-praising remarks, it generated substantially more negative impressions of the individual. Interestingly, while individuals practicing self-enhancement are viewed as competent, they are also perceived as socially unattractive (Powers and Zuroff 1988).

The literature discusses several strategies for mitigating the negative aspects of self-bragging, one of which is credit sharing. Credit sharing is a tactic employed by consumers to subtly convey their affiliation with a prestigious brand while maintaining an air of modesty by attributing it to external factors or individuals. This strategy enables one to subtly boast about their possessions, while simultaneously exhibiting gratitude by assigning the credit for these assets to others, such as a relative or friend. In doing so, the focus of the communication is skillfully shifted away from self-promotion to an appreciation of others, effectively sidestepping the potential drawbacks of self-bragging (Sekhon et al. 2015).

3.2.3 Attribution

Attribution theory, which delves into how individuals perceive and attribute causes to events, plays a crucial role in comprehending consumer behavior and responses to product performance. In the realm of marketing, researchers have extensively explored attributional processes, including consumer complaining, to gain deeper insights (Tsiros, Mittal, and Ross 2004; Weiner 2000; Folkes and Kotsos 1986; Krishnan and Valle 1979; Richins 1983; Valle and Wallendorf 1977). When consumers encounter variations in product performance, they proactively seek explanations for deviations from their expectations (He and Bond 2015).

In exploring recommenders' attribution processes, the perceptions of causality (Weiner 2000) offer a valuable framework. The content of feedback goes beyond merely signaling a positive or negative outcome. For instance, after receiving a recommendation of a shampoo product, the recipient may provide positive feedback, expressing that the shampoo fulfills its promises due to its specific formulation and compatibility with the user's hair type. In this scenario, the recommender may infer that (i) the recommendation was successful and (ii) why it was successful. Feedback significantly influences the recommender's evaluations and how they process the cause of the outcome, such as pondering why the recipient liked or

disliked it or what factors contributed to the good or bad experience, through an attribution process (Jones and Davis 1965; Kelley 1967, 1973).

3.2.4 The Link between Feedback Content, Self-Presentation, and Attribution

Linguistic styles establish the roles and responsibilities of the speaker and the listener (Goffman 1981). For example, the usage of the plural first-person ("we") indicates a stronger bond between the consumer and the brand (Sela et al. 2012). However, it could lead to resistance in consumers who don't already share a close connection with the brand. The usage of "you" directs responsibility to the other party (Fahnestock 2011; Ringberg, Odekerken-Schroder, and Christensen 2007) and even may signal blaming (Hahlweg et al. 1984). The use of first-person ("I"), on the other hand, signals the speaker's sense of or willingness to take responsibility (Ahearn 2001; Chung and Pennebaker 2007; Hahlweg, Revenstorf, and Schindler 1984; Kashima and Kashima 1998), concern about the situation (Scherwitz, Berton, and Leventhal 1978), and intention to understand the listener (Ickes et al. 1990; Wales 1996). Moreover, when product users are the subject of a favorable review, readers think that the user is responsible for the outcome, which results in a favorable evaluation of the product (Ostinelli and Luna 2021).

Collectively, these findings pave the way for predicting how feedback content (user-focused vs. product-focused) influences attribution processes and, consequently, recommenders' subsequent evaluations. We posit that recipients employ credit sharing when they provide product-focused positive feedback, and therefore they will be evaluated more favorably by recommenders. When recommenders receive positive feedback with user-focused content (for instance, mentioning personal preferences such as "owing to my taste in design and my pace of learning, this software could potentially be my favorite"), they perceive that recipients are claiming all the credit for the positive product experience. Because self-bragging is likely to result in less positive evaluations, recommenders may interpret recipients' such behavior of attributing all the positivity to themselves as an unfavorable trait.

Following the discussion above, we formally hypothesize that:

H1a: Product-focused feedback leads to a more favorable evaluation of the recipient than user-focused feedback when recommenders receive positive feedback.

When feedback is negative, product-focused feedback will imply that the product is responsible for the negative outcome. Because the product is an extension of the recommender's self, product-focused negative feedback puts the blame on the recommender through the product, so recipient evaluations will be affected negatively. User-focused feedback also leads to more negative evaluations of the recipient because the feedback downgrades their competence (Godfrey et al. 1986). Therefore, while we expect an overall negative effect of negative feedback on recipient evaluations, we do not expect any difference across different content types.

Given the arguments above, we hypothesize that:

H1b: Negative feedback leads to less favorable evaluations of the recipient regardless of the feedback content.

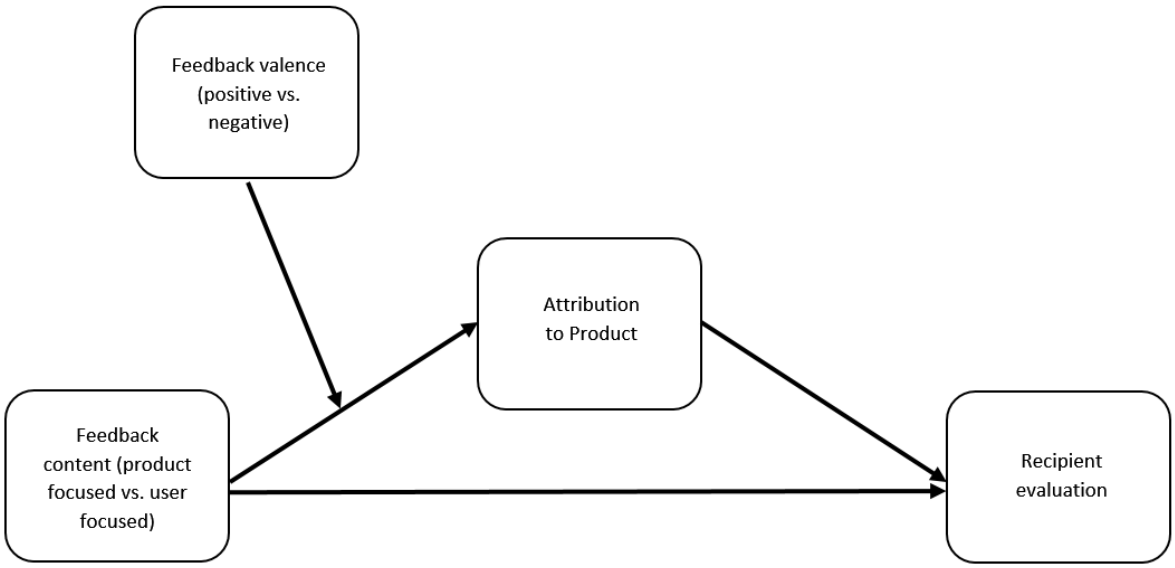

Figure 3.1 Conceptual Framework

3.3 Empirical Analysis

Three experiments were conducted to examine the impact of feedback content on the recommender's evaluation of the recipient, the underlying processes, and any asymmetrical differences in the recipient's feedback-giving behavior. In Study 1, we explored the moderating effect of feedback valence on the relationship between feedback content and recipient evaluation. In Study 2, we investigated whether attribution mediates the effect of feedback content on recipient evaluation. Lastly, in Study 3, we explored the recipient's feedback-giving behavior, whether they display a tendency to use one type of feedback content over another across positive and negative feedback conditions.

Table 3.1: Overview of Studies

Study	Data	Receiver	Product	Design	DVs
Study 1	Online experiment: 400 Prolific workers	Colleague	Software	Between: 2 Feedback valence (positive vs. negative) x 2 Feedback content (product-focused vs. user-focused) x control (no feedback)	Recipient Evaluation
Study 2	Online experiment: 160 Prolific workers	Colleague	Software	Between: 2 Feedback content (product-focused vs. user-focused)	Recipient Evaluation
Study 3	Online experiment: 160 Prolific workers	Colleague	Software	Between: 2 Experience type (positive vs. negative)	Recipient's Content Choice

3.3.1 Study 1: The Effect of Feedback Content on the Recommender's Evaluations

Study 1 aims to explore the effects of feedback content on the recommender's evaluation of the recipient, as well as whether these effects are moderated by feedback valence. Participants were instructed to imagine recommending a software product to a colleague and subsequently receiving feedback on their recommendation. The feedback varied in terms of the focus of its content (product-focused vs. user-focused), and its valence (positive vs. negative). The study also included a control condition in which there is no feedback.

Method

Participants. We recruited four hundred participants from Prolific Academic. Participants received a small fixed payment for their participation. Applying a pre-determined exclusion criterion, we removed participants who failed to complete the study, failed attention checks (i.e., choose two), or did not agree to continue the study. The final sample consisted of three hundred and eighty-five participants (53.8% women, median age=38 years).

Design. This study utilized a between-participants design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the feedback types; 2 (feedback valence: positive vs. negative) x 2 (feedback content: product-focused vs. user-focused). We also included a control condition where there was no feedback. Next, participants were asked to imagine recommending software to one of their colleagues.

In the positive (negative) feedback condition, participants received feedback from their colleagues indicating a positive (negative) experience with the recommended software. In the user-focused condition, participants received feedback in which "I" pronoun was emphasized. In the product-focused condition, "it" pronoun was emphasized in feedback. In the control condition, no feedback was given to the participants. Details of the manipulations are provided in Appendix F.

In the next stage, participants evaluated recipients, (being good-natured, sincere, or arrogant, using a ten-item seven-point scale; Cronbach's $\alpha = .919$), which is derived from

Fragale et al. (2009) and Wiggins (1979). Lastly, for the manipulation check, participants were asked to assess the valence of feedback on a scale ranging from 1 (negative) to 7 (positive).

Results

Manipulation check. The results of the manipulation check indicated that our feedback valence manipulation was successful. Specifically, there was a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 306) = 1026.251$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .770$), with participants evaluating the feedback valence significantly higher in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 6.1908$, $SD = .77829$) than in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 2.2115$, $SD = 1.32475$). Further, a two-way ANOVA with full interaction was not significant ($F(1, 304) = 3.688$, $p = .056$, $\eta 2 = .012$), suggesting that there was no significant interaction between feedback valence and feedback content.

Recipient Evaluation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using feedback type as the independent variable and recipient evaluation as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant main effect of feedback type ($F(4, 380) = 80.302$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .458$). Participants evaluated the recipient more favorably in the positive product-focused feedback condition ($M_{positive\text{-}productfocused} = 5.3973$, $SD = .62102$) ($F(1, 380) = 12.152$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .031$) compared to the positive user-focused feedback condition ($M_{positive\text{-}userfocused} = 4.9519$, $SD = 1.01276$) and no feedback condition ($M_{control} = 5.0143$, $SD = .80651$) ($F(1, 380) = 8.988$, $p = .003$, $\eta 2 = .023$). The difference between the user-focused and control condition was not significant ($F(1, 380) = .241$, $p = .624$, $\eta 2 = .001$).

There was no significant difference between participants' evaluation of negative product-focused feedback ($M_{negative\text{-}productfocused} = 3.6076$, $SD = .74382$) and negative user-focused feedback ($M_{negative\text{-}userfocused} = 3.7753$, $SD = .69399$, $F(1, 380) = 1.769$, $p = .184$, $\eta 2 = .005$). However, the recipient is evaluated more favorably in the control condition ($M_{control} = 5.0143$, $SD = .80651$) than in the negative product-focused condition ($F(1, 380) = .124.406$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .247$), and the negative user-focused condition ($F(1, 380) = 95.286$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .200$). Additionally, without the control condition, a full factorial ANOVA on

the recipient evaluation revealed a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 304) = 11.807$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .037$).

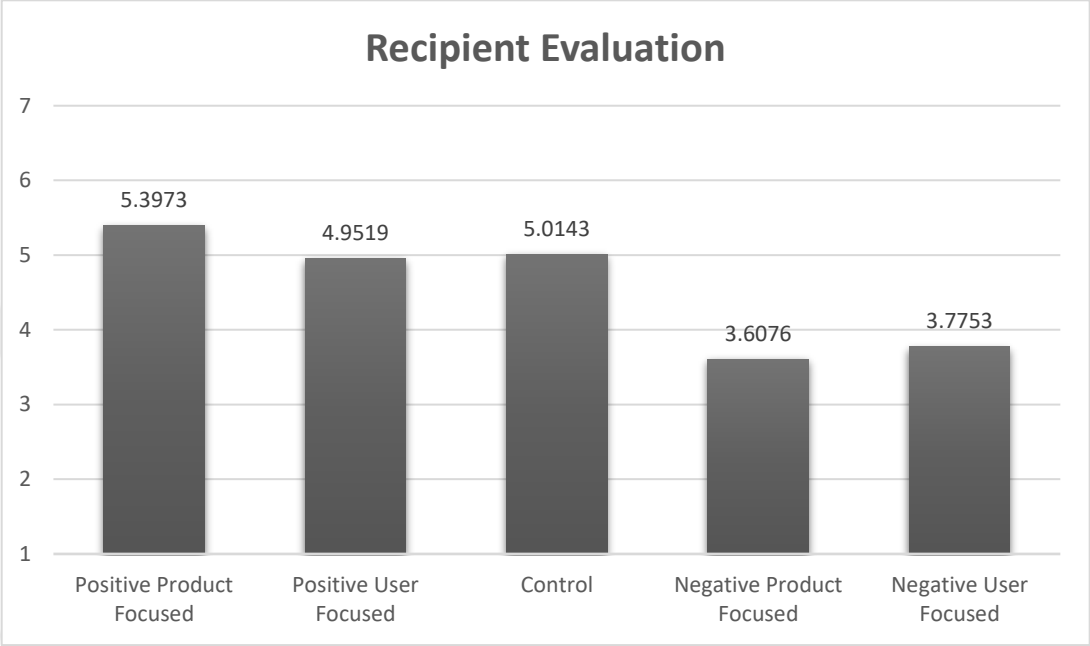

Figure 3.2: The effect of feedback types on recipient evaluation (Study 1)

Discussion

Regarding the effects on recipient evaluations, our results revealed a significant interaction effect between feedback content and feedback valence. Specifically, recipients are evaluated more favorably when there is positive product-focused feedback compared to both positive user-focused feedback and control conditions. The difference between the positive user-focused feedback and control condition was not significant, indicating that recommenders discount the positive feedback when it focuses on the recipient. In the case of negative feedback, there was no significant difference between the user-focused and product-focused conditions, as both resulted in recommenders evaluating recipients more negatively compared to the control condition.

3.3.2 Study 2: The Mediating Role of Attribution

The previous study provided evidence that recommenders evaluate recipients more favorably when they receive positive product-focused feedback compared to positive user-focused feedback. The purpose of the present study is to identify the underlying mechanism behind this effect. To that end, we explore the role of attribution as a mediator.

Method

Participants. One hundred and sixty respondents from a Prolific participated in this study in exchange for a small fixed payment. We again removed participants who failed attention checks or did not complete the study. The resulting sample consisted of one hundred and forty-eight respondents (64.2% women, median age=37 years) as a final sample.

Design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the feedback content conditions; 2 (feedback content: product-focused vs. user-focused). It utilized a between-participants design. The feedback manipulation used in Study 1 was applied also in this study. Participants were instructed to imagine recommending a product to a colleague and receiving positive feedback. Next, participants evaluated the recipient using a ten-item scale measuring traits such as good-natured, sincere, and arrogant on a seven-point scale. The scale was adapted from Fragale et al. (2009) and Wiggins (1979) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .920$).

To assess participants' attribution, a 2-item 7-point scale was used (i.e., "Sam thinks that this software is solely responsible for her experience", "Sam attributes her product experience solely to this software") ($\alpha = .824$).

Results

Recipient Evaluation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using feedback content as the independent variable and recipient evaluation as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant main effect of feedback content on recipient evaluations ($F(1, 146) = 25.263$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .148$). Participants evaluated the recipient more favorably in the product-focused condition ($M_{product\text{-}focused} = 5.4507$, $SD = .57497$) compared to the user-focused condition ($M_{user\text{-}focused} = 4.6707$, $SD = 1.19840$).

Attribution. We conducted an ANOVA with feedback content as the independent variable and attribution to the product as the dependent variable. Results showed a significant main effect of feedback content ($F(1, 148) = 27.212$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .157$). Specifically, participants made an inference that recipients attributed the outcome to the product more in the product-focused condition ($M_{product\text{-}focused} = 5.1712$, $SD = 1.11249$) than in the user-focused condition ($M_{user\text{-}focused} = 4.0600$, $SD = 1.45184$).

Mediation effect of attribution on recipient evaluation. To test whether the effect of feedback content on recipient evaluation is driven by attribution to the product (feedback content → attribution to the product → recipient evaluation), we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; Model 4) with a 2-level independent variable (product-focused vs. user-focused). Results show that an indirect effect through attribution accounted for the differences between the product-focused and the user-focused feedback conditions (b = -.1997, 95% CI = -.4167, -.0287). Regression coefficients are given in Figure 3.3.

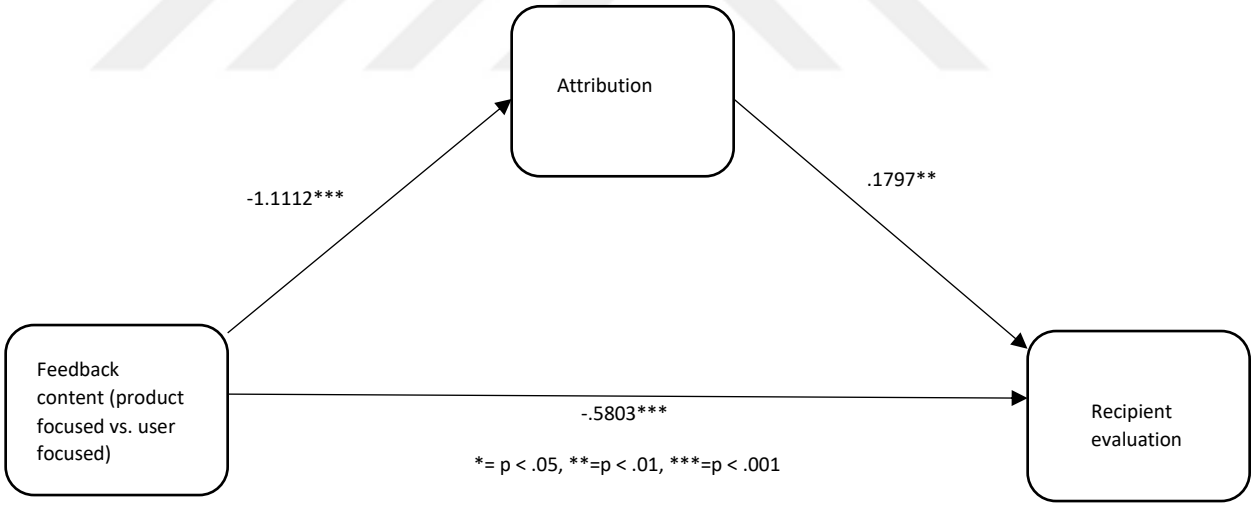

Figure 3.3: Mediating role of attribution on recipient evaluation-Framework (Study 2)

Discussion

The results of Study 2 shed light on the underlying mechanism at play. Findings demonstrate that when recommenders receive product-focused feedback, they infer that

recipients attributed the outcome to the product itself. As a result, the recipients were evaluated more favorably. On the other hand, when recommenders receive positive feedback with user-focused content (e.g., due to my taste in design and pace of learning, this software can become my favorite), they perceive that recipients are not giving credit to the product instead they give credit to themselves and other factors. As a result, recommenders discount positive user-focused feedback. This finding aligns with previously documented findings from the self-presentation literature, which indicates that individuals who engage in self-bragging are more likely to receive unfavorable evaluations (Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986). One way to mitigate this unfavorable evaluation is by sharing the credit (Sekhon et al. 2015). In the realm of product recommendations, recipients can achieve this by providing product-focused feedback, which attributes the credit to the product, leading to more positive evaluations.

Notably, our finding relates to previously documented evidence for an individual's tendency to display self-serving bias (Zuckerman 1979) and the desire to take credit for positive outcomes. Typically, recommenders want to be acknowledged for the positive feedback they receive. Our results show that this is achieved through the use of product-focused content. As the product is perceived as an extension of the self (Belk 1988; Fromkin and Snyder 1980), attributing credit to the product indirectly credits the recommender as well. Consequently, recommenders are more inclined to evaluate the recipient positively when the credit is ascribed to the product since it indirectly reflects credit back to the recommender.

3.3.3 Study 3: Recipients' Perspective

This study examines the impact of the recipient's experience type (positive vs. negative) on the utilization of feedback content (product-focused vs. user-focused). Participants were prompted to envision either a positive or negative experience and then provide feedback to recommenders using either product-focused or user-focused content. Our objective is to explore potential asymmetries between recipients' utilization of different feedback contents and the recommender's resulting evaluation response.

Method

Participants. For the study, we recruited one hundred and sixty participants from Prolific Academic. Participants were provided with monetary compensation for their participation. We applied the exclusion criteria used in previous studies, and this resulted in a final sample of one hundred and twenty-seven respondents, of whom 59.1% were women, with a median age of 30 years.

Design. This study employed a one-factor design, focusing on product experience (positive experience vs. negative experience) as the between-subjects factor. Participants were randomly assigned to either the positive or negative experience condition. They were then asked to imagine receiving a product recommendation, having the specified experience, and subsequently providing feedback to the recommender.

Next, participants received ten statements related to the product experience. While half of the statements emphasized the product's role (product-focused), the other half highlighted the user's role (user-focused) in the product experience. Participants were instructed to use five of the provided statements to give feedback.

Results

Feedback Content. As participants were presented with 10 choices (5 user-focused and 5 product-focused), we counted the total number of choices for each content type. For instance, if a participant selected 3 user-focused content and 2 product-focused content, we recorded their scores as 3 and 2, respectively. Utilizing these scores as our dependent variable and valence as our independent variable, we conducted an ANOVA to analyze the data.

An ANOVA conducted on the user-focused content demonstrated a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 125) = 9.868$, $p = .002$). Specifically, participants in the negative experience condition ($M_{negative} = 3.0161$) utilized significantly more user-focused content compared to those in the positive experience condition ($M_{positive} = 2.4000$). Additionally, an ANOVA conducted on the product-focused content also revealed a significant main effect for feedback valence ($F(1, 125) = 9.868$, $p = .002$). Participants in the

positive experience condition (Mpositive = 2.6000) used significantly more product-focused content compared to those in the negative experience condition (Mnegative = 1.9839).

The t-test results showed that when giving negative feedback, participants used significantly more user-focused content (Muser-focused = 3.0161) compared to product-focused content (Mproduct-focused = 1.9839), t(61) = 3.618, p = .001. However, when providing positive feedback, there was no significant difference between the use of user-focused content (Muser-focused = 2.4000) and product-focused content (Mproduct-focused = 2.6000), t(64) = -.742, p = .461.

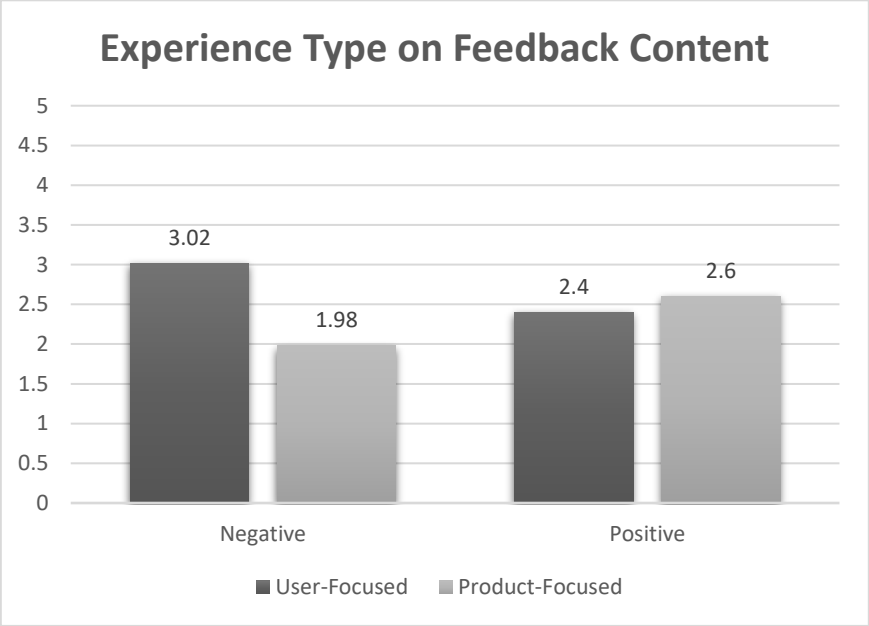

Figure 3.4: Recipient's experience type on feedback content (Study 3)

Discussion

The findings suggest that when participants are providing feedback about their negative product experiences, they display a tendency to use more user-focused content compared to product-focused content. However, when participants have a positive product experience, there is no significant difference in usage between user-focused and product-focused content. In other words, individuals do not prefer one type of feedback content over another when giving positive feedback.

When these results are considered together with the findings of Study 1, it appears that there is an asymmetry between recommenders' evaluations and recipients' usage of feedback content. Based on the results of Study 1, if recipients aim to be better evaluated, they should opt for product-focused content when giving feedback.

3.4 General Discussion

3.4.1 Summary of Findings

Our research shed light on the critical role of feedback content in shaping recommenders' subsequent evaluations. In study 1, we showed that the focus of feedback content (product-focused vs. user-focused) has an effect on the recommender's evaluation of recipients. Positive feedback leads to a more favorable evaluation of the recipient when the feedback focuses on the product rather than the user. However, when it is user-focused, recommenders discount the positive feedback and there is no significant difference between positive user-focused feedback and no feedback condition. In Study 2, we revealed that this effect occurs because of the attributions process. Lastly, in Study 3, we showed that recipients tend to provide more used-focused feedback than product-focused feedback when they talk about a negative experience, but there is no significant difference when they provide feedback on a positive experience.

3.4.2 Theoretical Contributions

Numerous studies have delved into the impact of linguistic style on consumer research (Berger and Packard 2023). Such research indicates that the way language is used can influence an individual's motivation to engage with messages (McQuarrie and Mick 2003; Meyers-Levy and Peracchio 1996; Petty et al. 2008) and the success of persuasive efforts (Packard, Moore, and McFerran 2018; Patrick and Hagtvedt 2012). Moreover, investigations have highlighted the outcomes of employing varied linguistic approaches, encompassing symbols, rhetorical devices, usage of various tenses, and specific pronouns (e.g., Ahluwalia and Burnkrant 2004; Packard et al. 2018). Our research contributes to this body of knowledge by examining how linguistic elements, specifically content focused on

products versus users, shape consumer responses within the context of feedback in product recommendations.

Secondly, the realm of word-of-mouth literature offers a wealth of research concerning the influence of linguistic style on communication. For instance, studies have delved into various aspects, including the use of swear words (Lafreniere et al. 2022), the choice between present and past tense (Packard et al. 2023), and the adoption of narrative styles (Hamby et al. 2015). Moving beyond the traditional approach of information sharing and focusing on the diversity of feedback content, we unraveled the intricate dynamics of word-of-mouth interactions and their implications on recommenders' evaluations. Accordingly, we offer a more comprehensive understanding of product recommendations and contribute to the word-of-mouth literature.

In the realm of marketing, researches have extensively delved into attributional processes to comprehend the underlying causes of outcomes (Tsiros, Mittal, and Ross 2004; Weiner 2000; Folkes and Kotsos 1986). Our research extends the attribution literature by showing that the attribution process mediates how recommenders update their evaluations of recipients upon receiving feedback.

Lastly, our research reveals the implications of self-presentation in product recommendations. Self-presentation refers to any behavior aimed at influencing the way others perceive an individual (Schlenker 2003). When recipients provide user-focused positive feedback, it indicates their inclination towards self-bragging rather than attributing the positive product experience to the product itself. Our research suggests that employing product-focused feedback eliminates self-bragging behavior and leads to more favorable evaluations.

3.4.3 Managerial Implications

Our findings hold valuable implications for businesses and professionals engaged in customer relationship management and word-of-mouth marketing. Our research indicates that feedback is not a monolithic construct but a diverse phenomenon that impacts the recommender's evaluations in nuanced ways.

Businesses can strategically use this understanding to train their customer service representatives or salespersons to provide targeted recommendations and react to customer feedback in a way that maximizes positive outcomes. Furthermore, the understanding of how self-serving bias works in recommendation systems can help businesses frame their customer feedback mechanisms. Based on our results, we encourage them to use more product-focused feedback, particularly when the feedback is positive.

3.4.4 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this study offers a profound understanding of the role of feedback content in shaping recommenders' evaluations, there is still plenty of room for future research. For instance, the solicitation of feedback and solicitation of recommendations could be investigated as potential moderators. Additionally, future research could explore how the impact of feedback on recommenders evolves over time. Subtle differences can be forgotten over time but the effect of information itself can persist into future periods. Lastly, it would be interesting to investigate how the influence of feedback content changes as recommenders gain more experience after repeated interactions with the same recipient. This would add a temporal aspect to our understanding of the dynamics of feedback content and recommender evaluations.

3.5 Data Collection Information

Data for studies 1 and 2 were collected from Prolific Academic in 2023. Data for study 3 was collected in 2021.

Chapter 4

4. CONCLUSION

Product recommendations have long been a focal point of attention in word-of-mouth literature. However, it's notable that the vast majority of existing studies concentrate on the initial phase of product recommendations—specifically, the moment when a consumer is presented with a product suggestion. This thesis seeks to extend this focus by acknowledging the potential for ongoing consumer dialogue after a recommendation has been made. This ongoing conversation involves the exchange of information concerning the recipient's actual experience with the recommended product.

This conceptual framework finds support in our preliminary exploratory survey involving 188 students, who were motivated by course credit to participate. A notable 89.4% of the participants expressed the intention to talk to the recommender about their experiences after receiving a movie recommendation. This resounding response substantiated our notion that recommenders could learn from the recipients about the outcome of the recommendation. Accordingly, we enrich the understanding of product recommendation conversations by introducing the concept of feedback. In our conceptualization, feedback reveals information about the recipients' experience with the recommended product. The inclusion of feedback introduces questions of both theoretical and managerial significance concerning how the recommender comprehends and reacts to the feedback they receive. This thesis tackles these questions through two distinct essays.

The first essay focuses on the valence of this feedback and investigates how recommenders update their evaluations of both the recipient and the product in response to the valence of feedback. We examine these effects across an exhaustive set of scenarios, taking into account factors such as whether the feedback is provided within a genuine real-life conversation context, is rooted in actual personal experiences, or is influenced by the recipient's pre-existing evaluations of the product. Our analyses demonstrate a robust effect of feedback valence on evaluations of both the recipient and the product. Furthermore, we

explore the underlying mechanism that drives these effects. We show that the valence of feedback initially influences the perception of similarity between the recommender and the recipient, which subsequently influences the recommender's evaluations. Last, but not the least, we shed light on the moderating role of product commitment. We find that the level of product commitment drives contrasting effects on recipient and product evaluations. Collectively, these insights contribute to a more profound understanding of the attitudinal consequences of product recommendation conversations.

The second essay of this dissertation expands the conceptualization of feedback that was initially introduced in the first essay. Here, we also consider the content and linguistic style of feedback, which could provide additional cues that help the recommender not only to learn the valence of the outcome but also to infer the underlying reasons. We examine the recommender's attitudinal responses to the choice of language in feedback that emphasizes either the recipient or the recommended product, as reflected through the usage of pronouns such as "I" versus "it." Our analyses reveal that positive feedback leads to a more favorable effect on the evaluations of the recipient when the emphasis is placed on the product, rather than on the recipient. We further demonstrate that this effect is driven by the increased tendency of recommenders to attribute positive outcomes to the recommended product. This attribution allows recommenders to share credit for the positive outcome. Conversely, feedback that places emphasis on the recipient fails to enable this sharing, leading to a discounted impact.

This thesis aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of product recommendations, particularly focusing on the often-overlooked consequences of these recommendations for recommenders. This inquiry holds valuable implications for consumer well-being, given the strong correlation between agreeing with others on everyday decisions such as mundane brand choices and the quality of personal relationships (Berscheid and Ammazzalorso 2001; Fehr and Harasymchuk 2005; Levinger and Breedlove 1966). I hope this thesis serves as an inspiration for further research on this important topic.

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APPENDIX A: Statistical Information of Chapter 2

STUDY 1: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF MANIPULATION CHECK

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Manipulation Check	1.9565 (1.11841)	6.5227 (.71079)

EVALUATIONS OF THE PRODUCT AND THE RECIPIENT

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**	**No Feedback**
Product Evaluation	3.0489 (1.62748)	8.0625 (1.27940)	7.3258 (1.32094)
Recipient Evaluation	3.5402 (.71238)	5.5432 (.67871)	4.7449 (.75619)

STUDY 2: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF THE PRODUCT AND THE RECIPIENT

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Product Evaluation	5.328 (2.36000)	8.175 (1.00786)
Recipient Evaluation	5.056 (1.10477)	5.812 (.78679)

	Negative Feedback		**Positive Feedback**	
	Pre-Evaluation	**Post-Evaluation**	**Pre-Evaluation**	**Post-Evaluation**
Product Evaluation	7.8824 (1.24177)	5.3301 (2.36000)	7.8711 (1.04672)	8.1730 (1.00786)
Recipient Evaluation	5.6516 (.85894)	5.0732 (1.10477)	5.6113 (.75288)	5.7956 (.78679)

STUDY 3: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF THE PRODUCT AND THE RECIPIENT

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Product Evaluation	4.6146 (2.03229)	6.4255 (1.98083)
Recipient Evaluation	4.5188 (1.18800)	5.6000 (.73069)

STUDY 4: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF THE PRODUCT AND SUBSEQUENT RECOMMENDATION

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Product Evaluation	5.7645 (2.44306)	8.0818 (.92756)
Subsequent Recommendation	4.08 (2.092)	6.48 (.737)

	Negative Feedback		**Positive Feedback**	
	Intangible	**Tangible**	**Intangible**	**Tangible**
Product Evaluation	5.0000 (2.50067)	6.5000 (2.15728)	8.1230 (.96028)	8.0561 (.91065)
Subsequent Recommendation	3.47 (2.094)	4.67 (1.926)	6.44 (.719)	6.51 (.750)

STUDY 5: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF MANIPULATION CHECK

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Manipulation Check	2.89 (1.263)	5.39 (1.358)

EVALUATIONS OF THE PRODUCT AND THE RECIPIENT

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Product Evaluation	4.5741 (1.76521)	7.3039 (1.25105)
Recipient Evaluation	3.6759 (.71380)	5.0127 (.748429)
Perceived Similarity	3.3889 (1.30857)	4.8137 (1.13410)
Mood State	4.4458 (.73979)	4.6324 (.65547)
Perceived Threat	2.7407 (1.68207)	2.9020 (1.52543)

STUDY 6: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF MANIPULATION CHECK

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Manipulation Check	2.44 (1.288)	6.10 (.823)

EVALUATIONS OF THE PRODUCT AND THE RECIPIENT

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Product Evaluation	4.2995 (2.18811)	7.9262 (.94996)
Recipient Evaluation	3.7203 (.91838)	5.4524 (.73876)

	Positive Feedback		**Negative Feedback**	
	Similar	**Dissimilar**	**Similar**	**Dissimilar**
Product Evaluation	7.9257 (.87860)	7.9266 (1.01568)	3.7243 (1.99437)	4.8857 (2.22989)
Recipient Evaluation	5.5475 (.70450)	5.3642 (.76176)	4.0084 (.82715)	3.4267 (.91728)

STUDY 7: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF MANIPULATION CHECK

	Negative Feedback	Positive Feedback
Feedback Valence Manipulation Check	2.44 (1.288)	6.0194 (.87883)

	Low Commitment	High Commitment
Product Commitment Manipulation Check	3.2115 (1.32373)	7.1444 (.96230)

EVALUATIONS OF THE PRODUCT, THE RECIPIENT, PERCEIVED SIMILARITY, AND AFFECTIVE RESPONSE

	Negative Feedback	Positive Feedback	No Feedback
Product Evaluation	3.9412 (2.40814)	7.3613 (1.60411)	6.5981 (1.79033)
Recipient Evaluation	4.0856 (.81268)	5.2039 (.81463)	4.8196 (.73367)
Perceived Similarity	3.3420 (1.12776)	4.8753 (1.23860)	4.5633 (.93747)
Affective Response	4.3279 (1.26431)	5.4688 (.85233)	5.2226 (.94592)

	No Feedback		Positive Feedback		Negative Feedback	
	High Commitment	**Low Commitment**	**High Commitment**	**Low Commitment**	**High Commitment**	**Low Commitment**
Product Evaluation	7.8052 (1.25435)	5.4506 (1.43528)	8.2039 (1.12895)	6.5506 (1.58032)	5.3734 (2.15797)	2.4122 (1.58408)
Recipient Evaluation	4.8558 (.71828)	4.7852 (.75085)	5.4855 (.82101)	4.9329 (.71445)	3.8975 (.82103)	4.2865 (.75875)
Perceived Similarity	4.7273 (.83548)	4.4074 (1.00554)	5.4298 (1.00195)	4.3418 (1.21479)	2.9156 (.97617)	3.7973 (1.10598)
Affective Response	5.8312 (.72572)	4.6440 (.74850)	5.8794 (.72908)	5.0738 (.77522)	5.1329 (.93917)	3.4685 (.96738)

APPENDIX B: Manipulations of Chapter 2

Study 1 Manipulations

Imagine Sam, who is one of your colleagues said:

"I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics."

Then you recommended the software you use.

A couple of days later, you came across Sam. She purchased the software you recommended.

She said:

Positive feedback condition:

"Overall impression is quite positive.

Wonderful presentations can be made, thanks to this software features!

This software was so easy to adapt. It was very quick to end up with great results.

Due to the product features, this software can become their most favorite.

It is the software, that makes such a change in design!"

Negative feedback condition:

"Overall impression is quite negative.

Any modest presentations cannot be made, due to this software features!

This software was not easy to adapt at all. It was not quick to end with results.

Due to the product's features, this software can become their least favorite.

It is the software, that makes such a change in design!"

Study 2 Manipulations

Please think of a friend. What is your friend's name?

Please write your friend's name.

Now imagine that you are having a daily conversation with the friend you have mentioned above. During the conversation, you learn that your friend wants to go to a restaurant in the evening.

Then, you recommend a restaurant.

Please indicate which restaurant you would recommend to your friend.

(Please write the name of the restaurant below.)

You have recommended the restaurant to your friend.

Your friend went to the restaurant you recommended. A couple of days later, you came across your friend.

The friend said:

Positive feedback condition:

"Overall impression is quite positive.

A wonderful time can be spent in this restaurant thanks to its features.

It is conveniently located, great food is served, and it offers good seating…

Due to the features of it, this restaurant can become the most favorite."

Negative feedback condition:

"Overall impression is quite negative.

A good time cannot be spent in this restaurant due to its features.

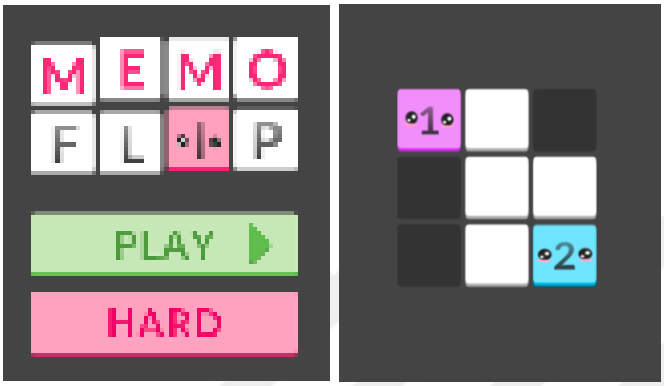
It is not conveniently located, bad food is served, and it doesn't offer good seating…

Due to the features of it, this restaurant can become the least favorite."

Study 3 Manipulations

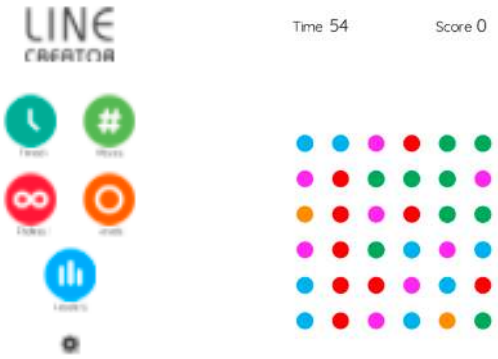
Game 1

In the MEMO FLIP game, some cards will be flipped. Once those flipped cards close, you are asked to click on the cards that were open. Continue on the game until the timer stops or until you lose the game. Write your score underneath.



Game 2

In the LINE CREATOR game, please select "Timed" (upper left button). There will be some dots displayed. Connect the dots with a line using a mouse, either horizontal or vertical. Try to create as many lines as possible. Write your score underneath.



Chat Instructions

1)Please copy and paste the same number above in the chatbox.

2)Please write your recommendation in the chatbox. (Which game you have recommended.)

3)Ask your colleague's feedback about the game.

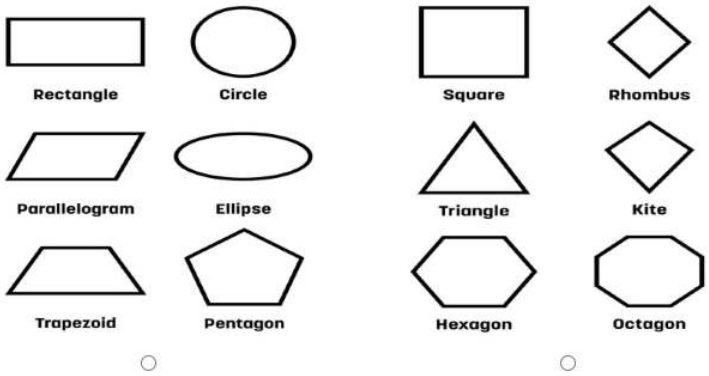
Study 6 Manipulations

Imagine you enrolled in an illustration and graphic design course where you meet other people. During the course, you engage in some networking workshops where you get to know each other and learn from your experiences.

Similarity with Recipient

During one of those networking-fun workshop, participants are asked to indicate their preferences about several things. The first preference question is about colors. Please indicate the color combination you like the most:

The second preference question is about shapes. Please indicate the shape combination you like the most:



The third preference question is about fonts. Please indicate the font you like the most:

DESIGN *DESIGN*

The final preference question is about paintings. Please indicate the painting you like the most:

In this illustration and design course, you are paired with one of the other fellows. You are paired with Sam. Sam is very similar to you. Sam's choices were exactly the same (color, shape, font, and painting).

Positive Feedback and Similar Other:

Imagine you are going to work on a project with Sam. As part of this project, Sam will design an illustration. And for this task, Sam has asked for a software recommendation from you. You recommend Sam a software that you have used before and that worked well. Sam used the software you recommended and gave you the following feedback:

"Overall impression is quite positive.

Wonderful presentations can be made, thanks to this software features!

This software was so easy to adopt. It was very quick to end up with great results.

This software can easily become a designer's most favorite."

Positive Feedback and Dissimilar Other:

Imagine you are going to work on a project with Sam. As part of this project, Sam will design an illustration. And for this task, Sam has asked for a software recommendation from you. You recommend Sam a software that you have used before and that worked well. Sam used the software you recommended and gave you the following feedback:

"Overall impression is quite positive.

Wonderful presentations can be made, thanks to this software features!

This software was so easy to adopt. It was very quick to end up with great results.

This software can become easily a designer's most favorite."

Negative Feedback and Similar Other:

Imagine you are going to work on a project with Sam. As part of this project, Sam will design an illustration. And for this task, Sam has asked for a software recommendation from you. You recommend Sam a software that you have used before and that worked well. Sam used the software you recommended and gave you the following feedback:

"Overall impression is quite negative.

Any modest presentations cannot be made, due to this software's features!

This software was not easy to adapt at all. It was not quick to end with results.

This software can become easily a designer's least favorite."

Negative Feedback and Dissimilar Other:

Imagine you are going to work on a project with Sam. As part of this project, Sam will design an illustration. And for this task, Sam has asked for a software recommendation from you. You recommend Sam a software that you have used before and that worked well. Sam used the software you recommended and gave you the following feedback:

"Overall impression is quite negative.

Any modest presentations cannot be made, due to this software's features!

This software was not easy to adapt at all. It was not quick to end with results.

This software can become easily a designer's least favorite."

Study 7 Manipulations

Product Commitment

High Commitment:

We would like you to imagine a software that you have a very consistent relationship.

Imagine that

You:

Have used it for a long time (more than a year)

Feel committed to (use this software regularly)

Are likely to keep using it in the future (intend to use it in the future)

Are loyal to (prefer to use over others, tend to use repeatedly even with other options available)

Low Commitment:

We would like you to imagine a software that you have a causal relationship.

Imagine that

You:

Have used it for a short time (less than a year)

Don't feel very committed to (sometimes use this software, sometimes others)

Are not particularly likely to use it regularly in the future (might still use in the future, but might not)

Are not particularly loyal to (sometimes use this software, and sometimes others that are available)

APPENDIX C: Scales of Chapter 2

Feedback Valence Manipulation Check

How would you evaluate Sam's feedback?

1 (Very negative)… 7 (Very positive)

Product Evaluation Scale

After receiving this feedback, please evaluate the software you have recommended based on the following dimensions.

1 (Not appealing at all)… 9 (Extremely appealing)

1 (Not good at all)… 9 (Extremely good)

Recipient Evaluation Scale

To what extent do you think Sam is...

Warm 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Tolerant 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Good-natured 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Kind 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Laid-back/easy to please 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Picky/hard to please 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Honest 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Have a balanced view 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Arrogant 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Sincere 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Perceived Similarity Scale

Please complete the sentence below.

Sam is...

Not at all similar to me (1)…Very much similar to me (7)…

Not at all like me (1)…Very much like me (7)…

Nothing in common with me(1)… Very much in common with me (7)…

Mood Scale

Please indicate how much you feel each of the following state descriptors.

Interested Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Excited Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Guilty Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Distressed Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Upset Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Strong Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Scared Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Hostile Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Enthusiastic Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Proud Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Irritable Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Alert Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Ashamed Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Inspired Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Nervous Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Determined Not at all (1)…Very much (7)

Attentive Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Jittery Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Active Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Afraid Not at all (1)… Very much (7)

Perceived Threat Scale

To what extent do you feel threatened at this moment?

Not at all (1)… Extremely (7)

Affective Response Scale

To what extent do you... Not at all (1) Very much (7)

Gratitude:

...I feel grateful to the software.

...I feel appreciative of the software.

...I feel indebted to the software.

Anger:

To what extent do you...

...I feel furious at this software.

...I have a feeling of revulsion to this software.

...I have a feeling of loathing to this software.

Product Commitment Manipulation Check Scale

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements. 1 (Don't agree at all), 8 (Agree completely)

I can see myself using this software in the long term.

I would feel very upset if this software stopped existing in the near future.

APPENDIX D: Additional Variables and Measures of Chapter 2

Study 1

Recipient Evaluation. An ANCOVA on the recipient evaluation was measured by controlling the pre-evaluation of the recipient. A significant main effect of feedback valence was revealed ($F(1, 309) = 99.183$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .243$). The recipient was evaluated as significantly less positive in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 5.056, SD = 1.10477) than in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 5.812, SD = .78679).

Product Evaluation. An ANCOVA was conducted on the product evaluation while controlling for the pre-evaluation of the product. Results showed a significant main effect for feedback valence ($F(1, 309) = 208.166$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .403$), with the product being evaluated significantly less positively in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 5.328, SD = 2.36000) than in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 8.175, SD = 1.00786), in line with our predictions.

Study 4

Type of Offering as a Covariate

Product evaluation. An ANOVA on the product evaluation revealed a main effect for feedback valence ($F(1, 311) = 119.271$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .277$). As predicted, product evaluations in the negative feedback condition were significantly less favorable (Mnegative = 5.7645, SD = 2.44306) than those in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 8.0818, SD = .92756).

Subsequent Recommendation. An ANOVA on the subsequent recommendation revealed a main effect for feedback valence ($F(1, 311) = 180.172$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .367$). As predicted, subsequent recommendations in the negative feedback condition were significantly less likely (Mnegative = 4.08, SD = 2.092) than those in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 6.48, SD = .737).

Study 5

Mediation effect of perceived similarity and mood on recipient evaluation. To test whether the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation is driven by perceived similarity, mood, or perceived threat, we conducted a parallel mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; Model 4) through perceived similarity (feedback → perceived similarity → recipient evaluation) and mood (feedback → mood → recipient evaluation) with 2-level independent variables (positive vs. negative feedback). The effect of feedback valence on perceived threat was not significant; therefore, we did not include perceived threat in the analysis. Regression coefficients appear in Figure 2.18. Results show that an indirect effect through perceived similarity accounted for the differences between the positive feedback and the negative feedback conditions (b = -.4610, 95% CI = -.6507, -.3014). By contrast, the mediation through mood (b = -.0124, 95% CI = -.0500, .0086) did not account for the difference between the positive feedback and the negative feedback.

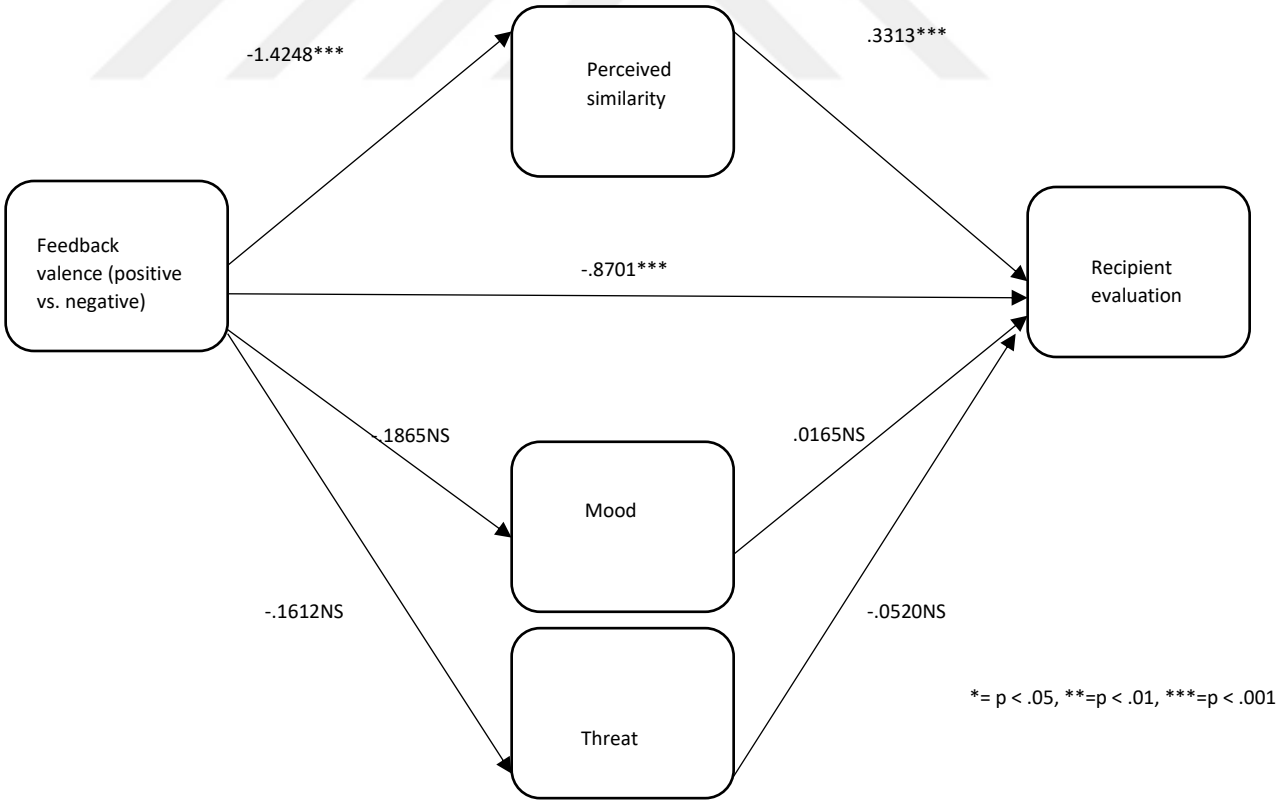


Figure 2.18: Mediating role of perceived similarity, mood, and perceived threat on recipient evaluation (all variables) (Study 5)

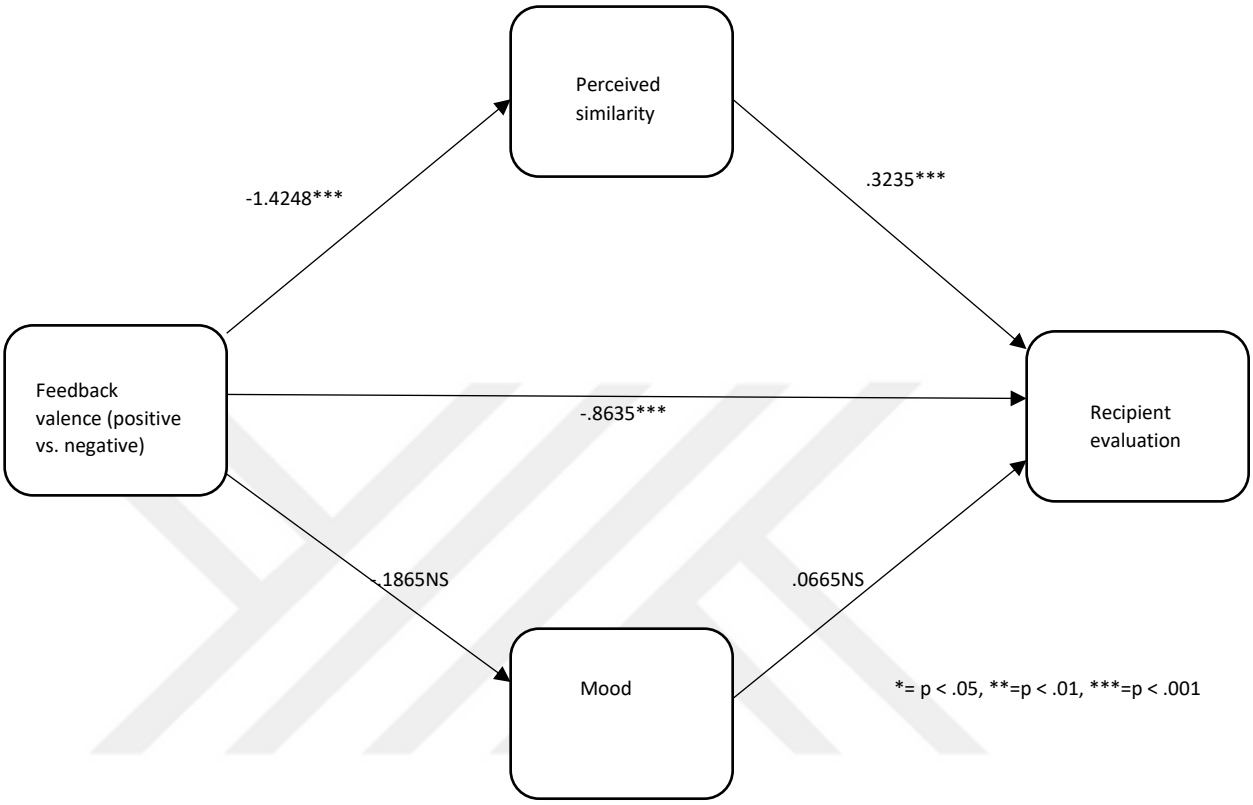


Figure 2.19: Mediating role of perceived similarity and mood on recipient evaluation (Study 5)

Mediation effect of perceived similarity and mood on product evaluation. We conducted a parallel mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017, Model 4) to examine whether perceived similarity and mood mediated the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation, using a 2-level independent variable (positive vs. negative feedback). Since the effect of feedback valence on perceived threat was not significant, we excluded it from the analysis. Regression coefficients are presented in Figure 2.20. The results showed that perceived similarity mediated the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation, with a significant indirect effect (b = -.6646, 95% CI = -.9990, -.3797). However, the mediation through mood was not significant (b = .0105, 95% CI = -.0591, .0811). These findings suggest that perceived similarity plays a more important role than mood in explaining the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation.

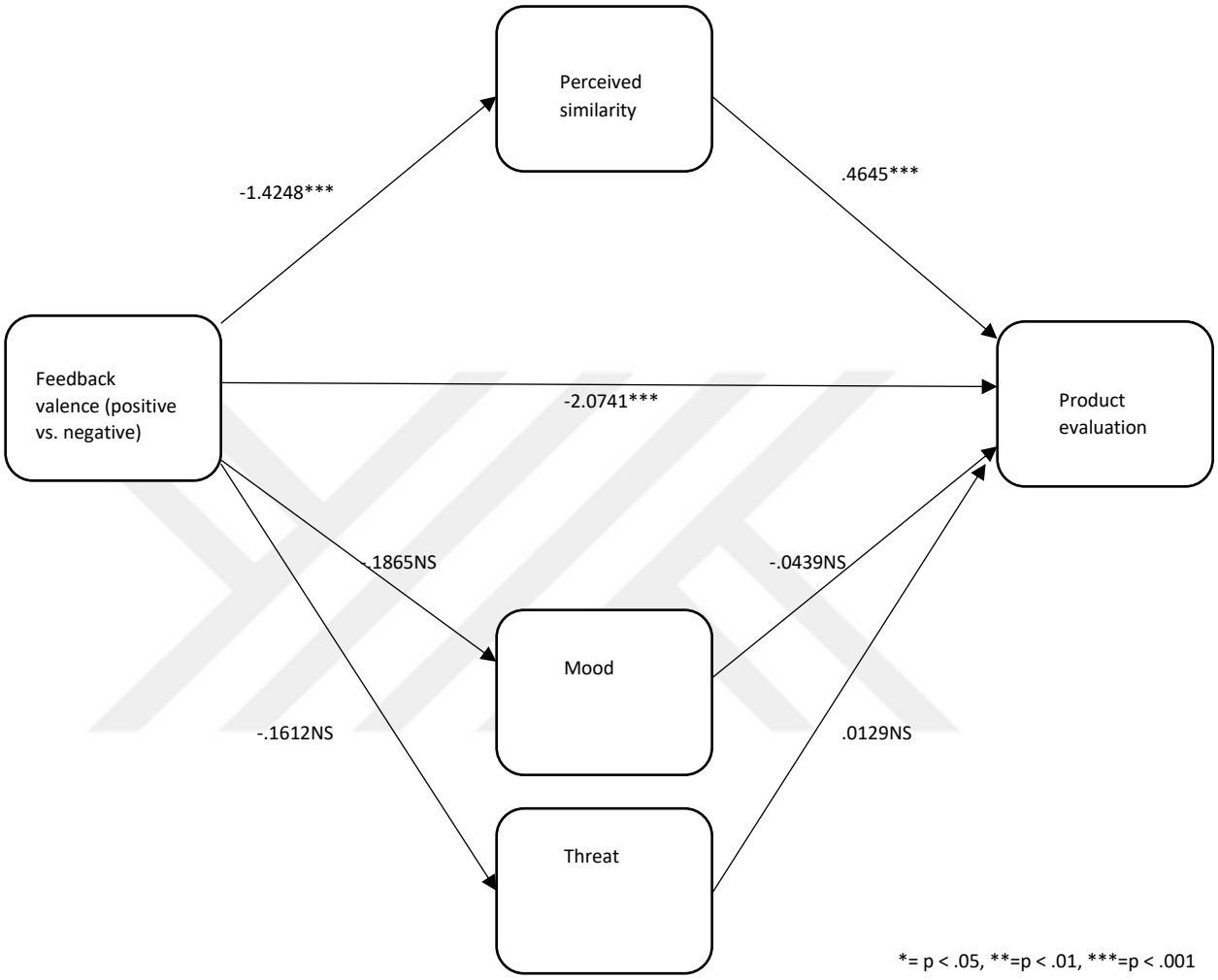


Figure 2.20: Mediating role of perceived similarity, mood, and perceived threat on product evaluation (all variables) (Study 5)

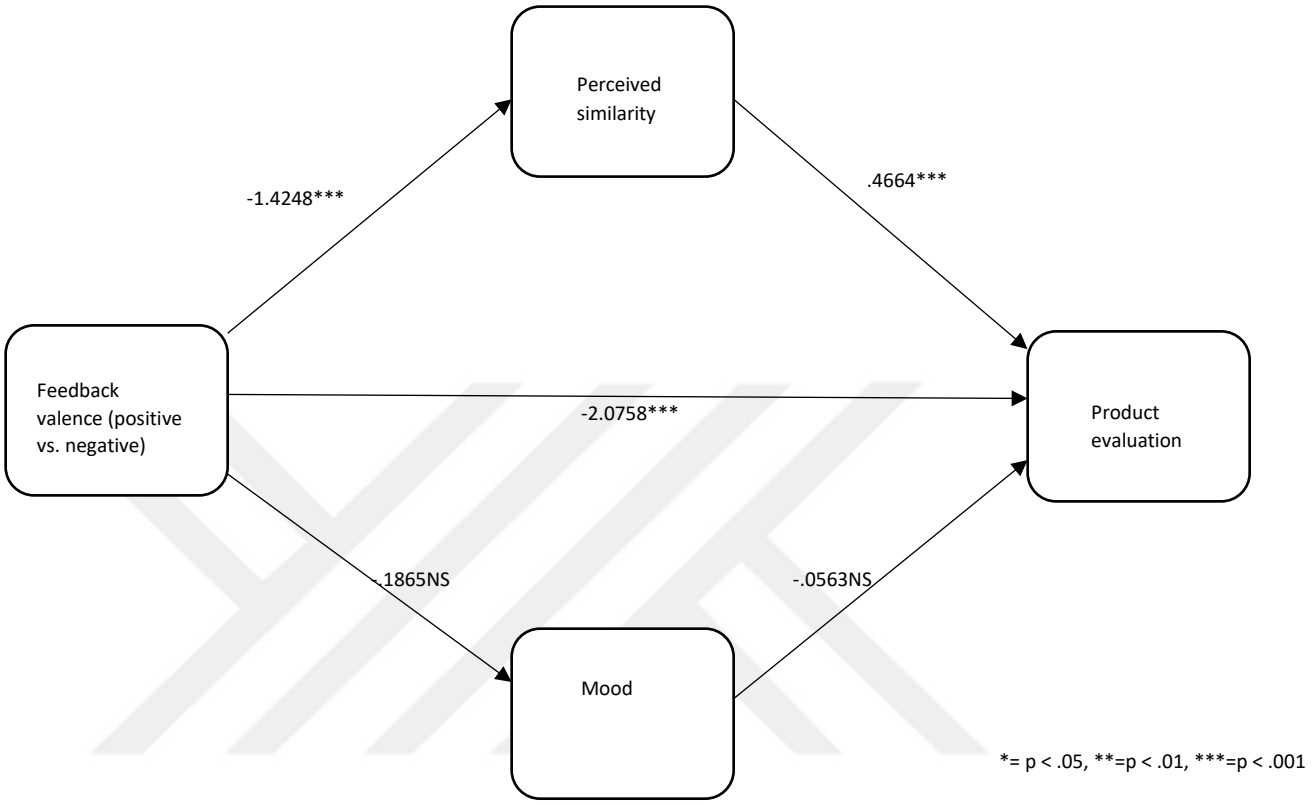


Figure 2.21: Mediating role of perceived similarity and mood on product evaluation (Study 5)

Study 6

Recipient Evaluation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted, using feedback valence as the independent variable and recipient evaluation as the dependent variable. Results showed a significant main effect of feedback valence ($F(1, 420) = 455.213$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .520$). Participants evaluated the recipient less favorably in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 3.7203$, $SD = .91838$) compared to the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 5.4524$, $SD = .73876$).

Product Evaluation. An ANOVA was conducted with feedback valence as the independent variable and product evaluation as the dependent variable, which revealed a significant main effect ($F(1, 420) = 486.123$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .536$). The product received

significantly lower evaluations in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 4.2995, SD = 2.18811) compared to the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 7.9262, SD = .94996).

Study 7

Perceived Similarity: An ANOVA confirmed that there was a significant main effect ($F(2, 463) = 82.441$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .263$). Specifically, participants perceived less similarity in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 3.3420, SD = 1.12776) than in the control condition (Mcontrol = 4.5633, SD = .93747, $F(1, 463) = 94.573$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .170$) or in the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 4.8753, SD = 1.23860, $F(1, 463) = 147.657$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .242$). Furthermore, when feedback was positive, participants perceived more similarity than when there was no feedback ($F(1, 463) = 6.212$, $p=.013$, $\eta 2 = .013$).

Recipient Evaluation: An analysis of variance (ANOVA) using feedback valence as the independent variable and recipient evaluation as the dependent variable revealed a significant main effect ($F(2, 463) = 80.107$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .257$). As predicted, the recipient was evaluated less favorably in the negative feedback condition (Mnegative = 4.0856, SD = .81268) compared to the control condition (Mcontrol = 4.8196, SD = .73367, $F(1, 463) = 67.536$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .127$) and the positive feedback condition (Mpositive = 5.2039, SD = .81463, $F(1, 463) = 155.276$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .251$). In addition, recipients were evaluated more favorably in the positive feedback condition than in the control condition ($F(1, 463) = 18.631$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .039$).

Mediation effect of perceived similarity on recipient evaluation. To examine whether the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation is mediated by perceived similarity, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; model 4) through perceived similarity (feedback valence → perceived similarity → recipient evaluation) with a three-level, multicategorical independent variable (control vs. positive feedback vs. negative feedback). The regression coefficients are presented in Figure 2.22. We used the control condition as the reference category in the test of group differences, with each coefficient representing the contrast between the reference category and the respective feedback condition. The results indicate that perceived similarity mediated the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation. Specifically, there was a significant indirect effect through perceived similarity for the contrast between control condition vs. positive feedback (b = 0.1125, 95% CI = 0.0219

to 0.2091) and for the contrast between control condition vs. negative feedback (b = -0.4404, 95% CI = -0.5663 to -0.3234).

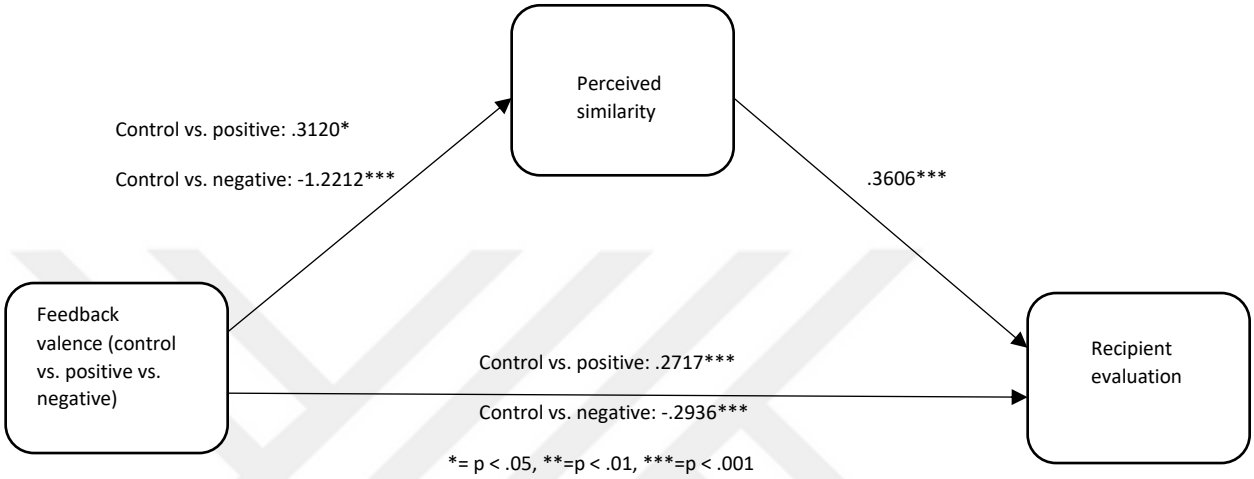


Figure 2.22: Mediating role of perceived similarity on recipient evaluation: control as a reference group (Study 7)

Mediation effect of perceived similarity on recipient evaluation. To examine whether the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation is mediated by perceived similarity, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; model 4) with a three-level, multicategorical independent variable (i.e., control vs. positive feedback vs. negative feedback). The analysis included perceived similarity as the mediator variable between feedback valence and recipient evaluation (feedback valence → perceived similarity → recipient evaluation). Regression coefficients are presented in Figure 2.23, with the control condition as the comparison group for the test of group differences. The results indicate that there was a significant indirect effect through perceived similarity for the comparison between positive feedback and negative feedback (b = -.5529, 95% CI = -.7015, -.4138).

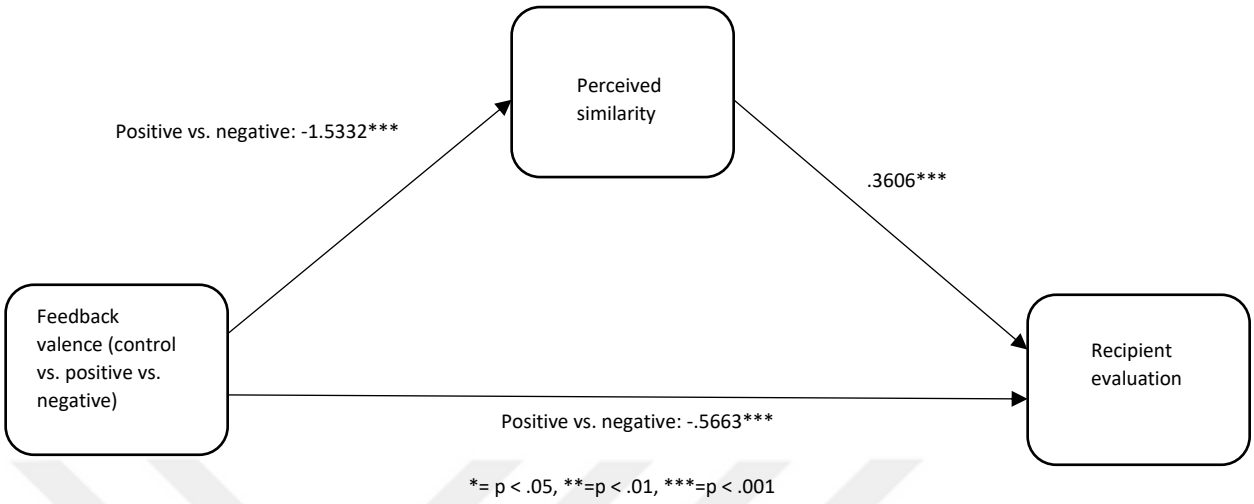


Figure 2.23: Mediating role of perceived similarity on recipient evaluation: positive vs. negative (Study 7)

Product Evaluation: An ANOVA with feedback valence as the independent variable and product evaluation as the dependent variable showed a significant main effect ($F(2, 463) = 128.957$, $p<.001$, $\eta2 = .358$). As hypothesized, the product received a significantly less favorable evaluation in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 3.9412$, $SD = 2.40814$) compared to the control condition ($M_{control} = 6.5981$, $SD = 1.79033$, $F(1, 463) = 142.650$, $p<.001$, $\eta2 = .236$) or the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 7.3613$, $SD = 1.60411$, $F(1, 463) = 234.142$, $p<.001$, $\eta2 = .336$). Additionally, there was a significant difference between the control and positive feedback conditions ($F(1, 463) = 11.848$, $p<.001$, $\eta2 = .025$).

Mediation effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation. To test whether the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation is driven by the perceived similarity, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; model 4) through perceived similarity (feedback valence → perceived similarity → product evaluation) with a three-level, multicategorical independent variables (i.e., control vs. positive feedback vs. negative feedback). Regression coefficients appear in Figure 2.24, with the control condition as the comparison condition in the test group differences (i.e., each coefficient represents the contrast test against the control condition). Results show that an indirect effect through

perceived similarity accounted for the differences between the control condition vs. positive feedback (b=.0717, 95% CI= .0035, .1555) as well as for the difference between the control condition vs. negative feedback (b=-.2808, 95% CI= -.5396, -.0348).

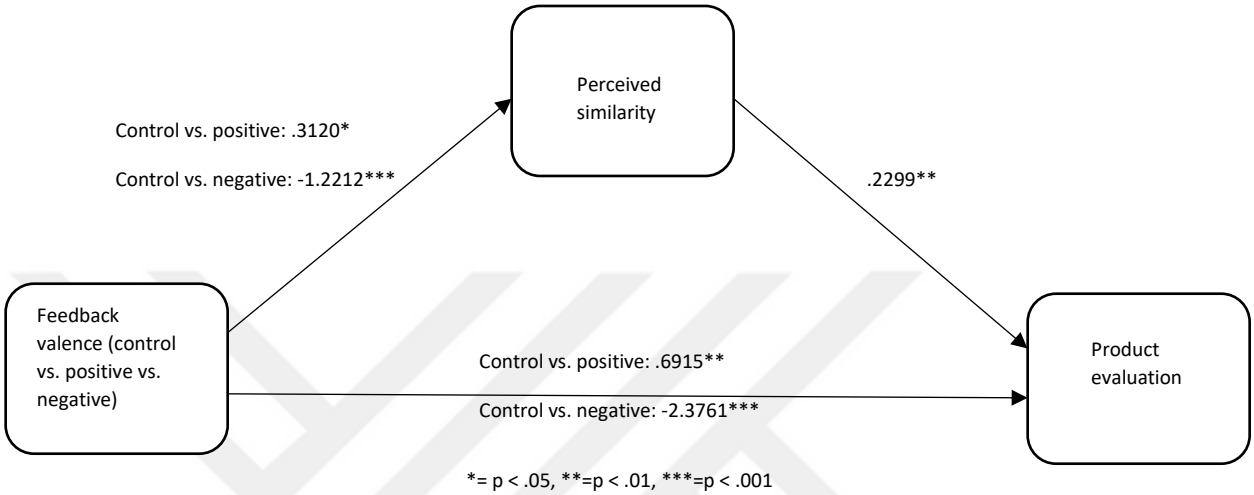


Figure 2.24: Mediating role of perceived similarity on product evaluation: control as a reference group (Study 7)

Mediation effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation. To test whether the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation is driven by the perceived similarity, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; model 4) through perceived similarity (feedback valence → perceived similarity → product evaluation) with a three-level, multicategorical independent variables (i.e., control vs. positive feedback vs. negative feedback). Regression coefficients appear in Figure 2.25, comparing the positive feedback condition with the negative feedback condition. Results show that an indirect effect through perceived similarity accounted for the differences between positive feedback and negative feedback (b=-.3525, 95% CI= -.6458, -.0662).

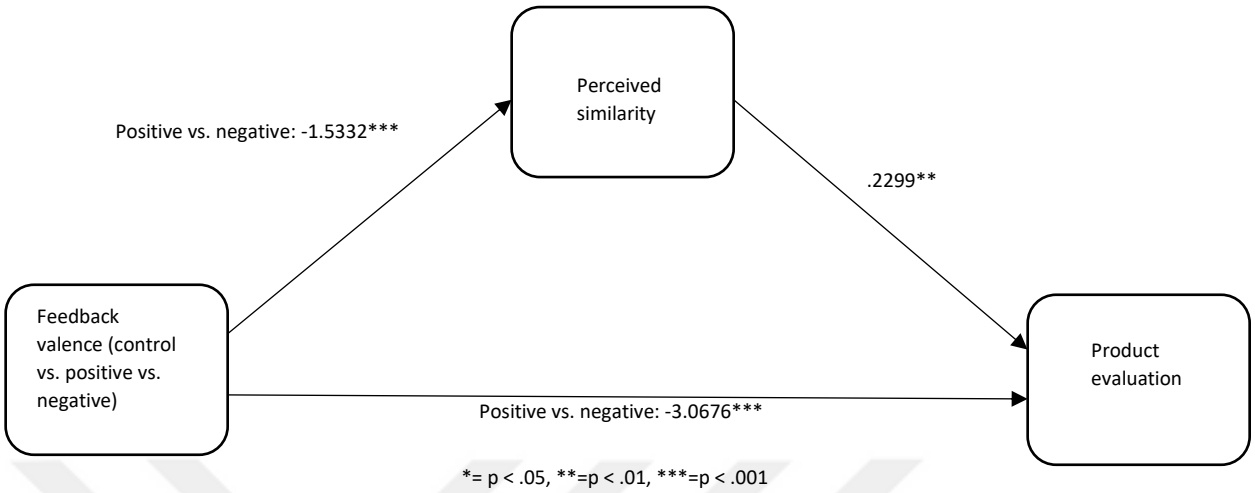


Figure 2.25: Mediating role of perceived similarity on product evaluation: positive vs. negative (Study 7)

Moderated mediation perceived similarity on recipient evaluation. We conducted a study to test whether perceived similarity mediates the effect of feedback valence on recipient evaluation and whether this mediating path is moderated by product commitment (Hayes 2013, model 14, Figure 2.26). We focused on comparing the positive feedback condition with the negative feedback condition, and we coded the positive feedback condition as 0 and the negative feedback condition as 2. The index of moderated mediation was significant (b=.2144, 95% CI=.0175, .4159; Figure 26 shows complete path coefficients). These findings indicate that positive feedback results in higher perceived similarity than negative feedback, and that the mediating role of perceived similarity on recipient evaluation is stronger when product commitment is high compared to low product commitment.

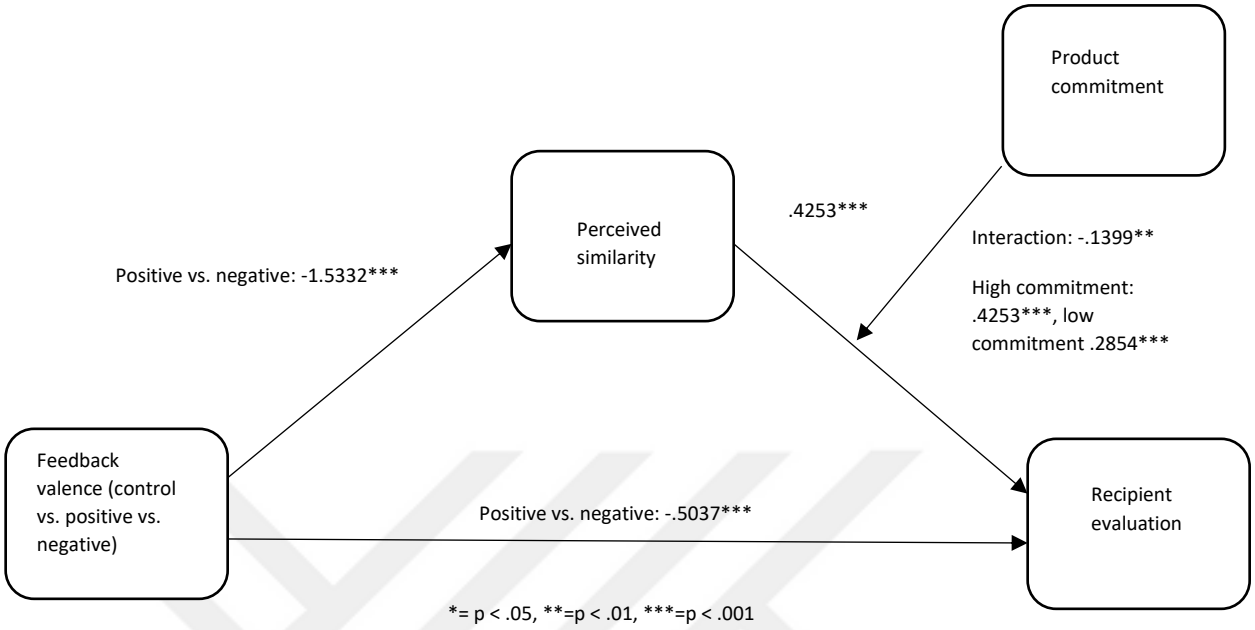


Figure 2.26: Moderated mediation on recipient evaluation: positive vs. negative (Study 7)

Moderated mediation perceived similarity on product evaluation. We conducted moderated mediation analyses to test whether product commitment moderates the effect of perceived similarity, which mediates the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation (Hayes 2013, model 14, Figure 2.27). We focused on the comparison between the positive feedback condition and the negative feedback condition. The index of moderated mediation was significant (b=-.5441, 95% CI= -.9714, -.1315).

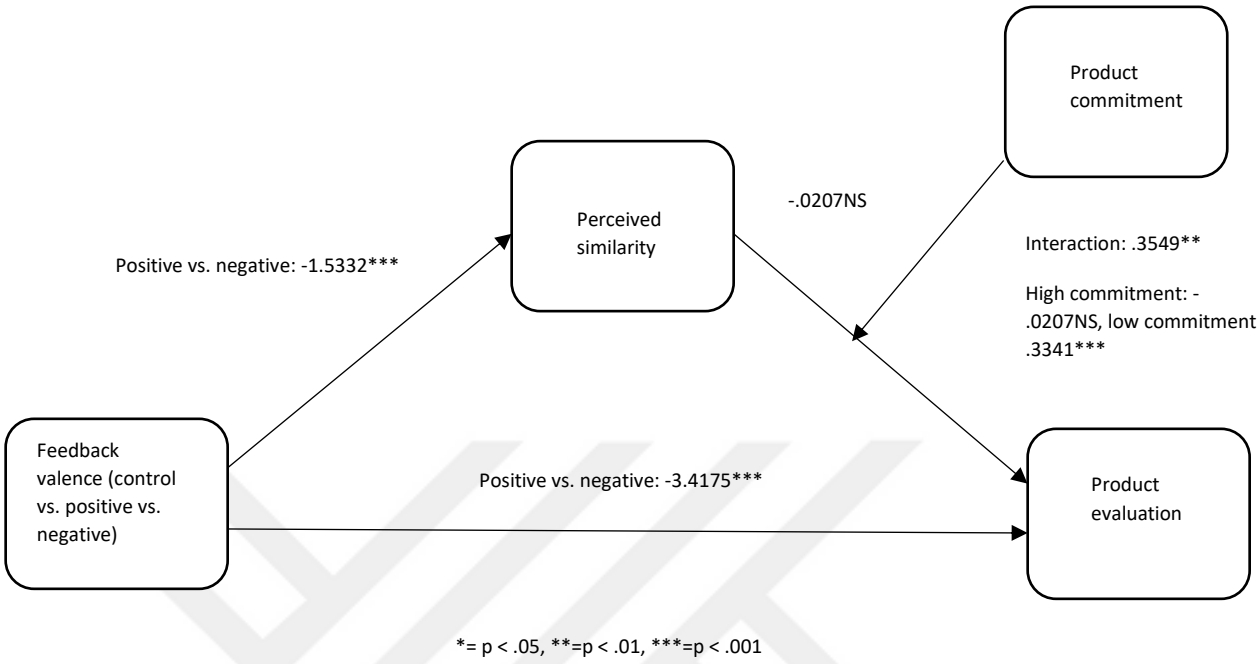


Figure 2.27: Moderated mediation on product evaluation: positive vs. negative (Study 7)

We included a second measure of product evaluation, assessing participants' affective response to the software.

Affective Response. The results of an ANOVA, with feedback valence as the independent variable and affective response as the dependent variable, showed a significant main effect ($F(2, 463) = 51.858$, $p<.001$, $\eta2 = .183$). As predicted, the product was evaluated as significantly less favorable in the negative feedback condition ($M_{negative} = 4.3279$, $SD = 1.26431$) than in the control condition ($M_{control} = 5.2226$, $SD = .94592$, $F(1, 463) = 58.160$, $p<.001$, $\eta2 = .112$), or in the positive feedback condition ($M_{positive} = 5.4688$, $SD = .85233$, $F(1, 463) = 93.688$, $p<.001$, $\eta2 = .168$). Additionally, products were evaluated more favorably in the positive feedback condition than in the control condition ($F(1, 463) = 4.435$, $p=.036$, $\eta2 = .009$).

The results of a two-way ANOVA with a full interaction effect were significant ($F(2, 460) = 10.611$, $p < .001$, $\eta2 = .044$). Follow-up analysis using contrasts indicated that

participants with high product commitment did not rate the product more positively in the positive feedback condition (Mhigh-positive = 5.8794, SD = .72908) compared to the control condition (Mhigh-control = 5.8312, SD = .72572) ($F(1, 460) = .133$, $p = .716$, $\eta 2 = .000$). However, participants rated the product significantly less favorably in the negative feedback condition (Mhigh-negative = 5.1329, SD = .93917) compared to both the control condition ($F(1, 460) = 28.330$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .058$) and the positive feedback condition ($F(1, 460) = 32.163$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .065$).

When participants had a low commitment, they rated the product more positively in the positive feedback condition (Mlow-positive= 5.0738, SD = .77522) compared to the control condition (Mlow-control = 4.6440, SD = .74850) ($F(1, 460) = 11.009$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .023$). The product received significantly lower evaluations in the negative feedback condition (Mlow-negative= 3.4685, SD = .96738) compared to both the control condition ($F(1, 460) = 79.633$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .148$) and the positive feedback condition ($F(1, 460) = 146.736$, $p<.001$, $\eta 2 = .242$).

Mediation effect of perceived similarity on affective response. To examine whether the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation is mediated by perceived similarity, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; model 4) with perceived similarity as the mediator (feedback valence -> perceived similarity -> product evaluation) using a three-level, multicategorical independent variable (i.e., control vs. positive feedback vs. negative feedback). The regression coefficients are presented in Figure 2.28, with the control condition as the reference category in the test of group differences (i.e., each coefficient represents the contrast test against the control condition). Results indicated that perceived similarity mediated the differences between the control condition vs. positive feedback (b=.0343, 95% CI= .0011, .0791) as well as for the difference between the control condition vs. negative feedback (b=-.1345, 95% CI= -.2662, -.0119).

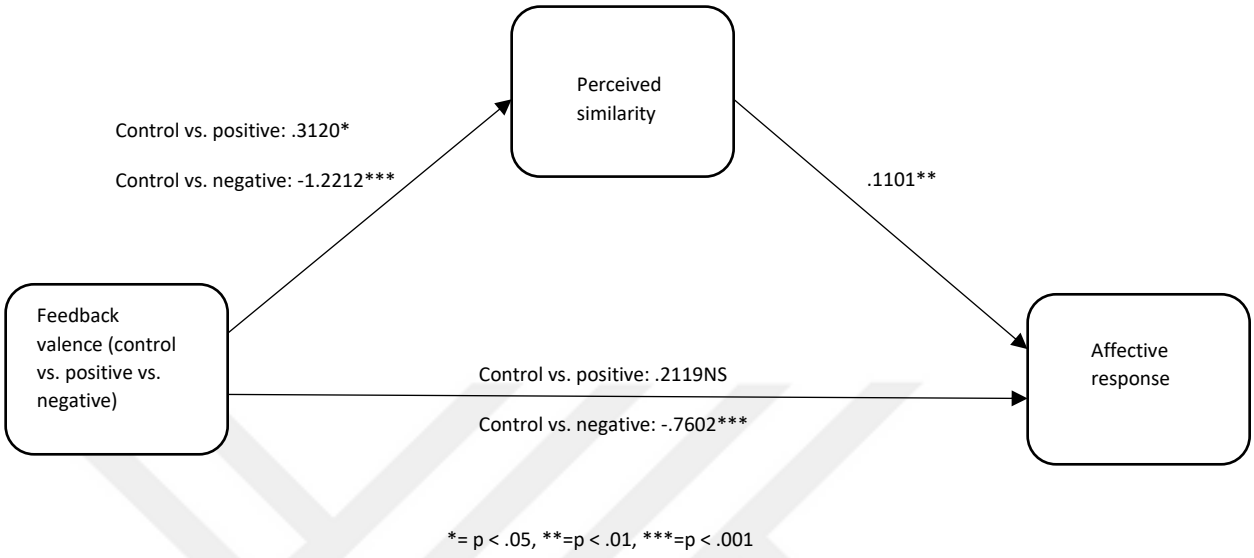


Figure 2.28: Mediating role of perceived similarity on affective evaluation of product: control as a reference group (Study 7)

Mediation effect of perceived similarity on affective response. To test whether the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation is driven by the perceived similarity, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes 2017; model 4) through perceived similarity (feedback valence → perceived similarity → product evaluation) with a three-level, multicategorical independent variables (i.e., control vs. positive feedback vs. negative feedback). Regression coefficients appear in Figure 2.29 comparing the positive feedback condition with the negative feedback condition. Results show that an indirect effect through perceived similarity accounted for the differences between positive feedback and negative feedback (b=-.1688, 95% CI= -.3303 -.0106).

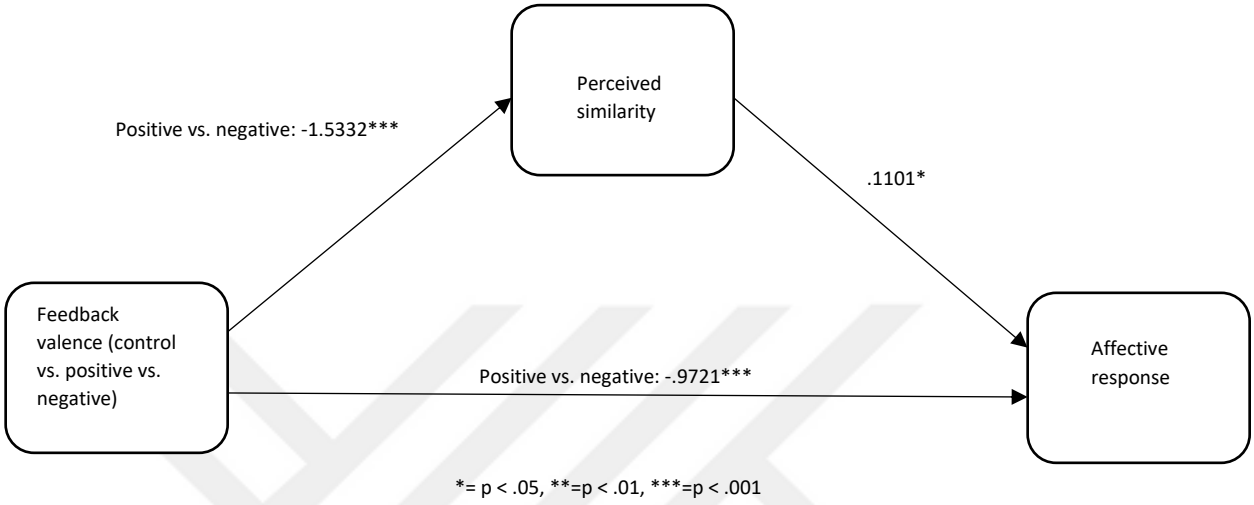


Figure 2.29: Mediating role of perceived similarity on affective evaluation of product: positive vs. negative (Study 7)

A two-way ANOVA with product commitment and feedback valence as independent variables and affective response as the dependent variable revealed a significant full interaction effect ($F(2, 460) = 10.611$, $p<.001$). Participants with high product commitment did not evaluate the product more positively when they received positive feedback ($M_{high\text{-}positive} = 5.8794$) compared to when they did not receive feedback ($M_{high\text{-}control} = 5.8312$) ($F(1, 460) = .133$, $p=.716$). In the high commitment condition, the product was evaluated as significantly less favorable in the negative feedback condition ($M_{high\text{-}negative} = 5.1329$) than in the control condition ($F(1, 460) = 28.330$, $p<.001$), or in the positive feedback condition ($F(1, 460) = 32.163$, $p<.001$).

If participants had a low commitment, they evaluated the product more favorably in the positive feedback condition ($M_{low\text{-}positive} = 5.0738$) than in the control condition ($M_{low\text{-}control} = 4.6440$), and this effect was statistically significant ($F(1, 460) = 11.009$, $p<.001$). However, the product was evaluated as significantly less favorable in the negative

feedback condition (Mlow-negative= 3.4685) than in the control condition (F(1, 460) = 79.633, p<.001), or in the positive feedback condition (F(1, 460) = 146.736, p<.001).

Moderated mediation perceived similarity on affective response. We conducted moderated mediation analyses to examine whether product commitment moderates the effect of perceived similarity, which in turn mediates the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation (Hayes 2013, model 14, Figure 2.30). Our first comparison was between the no feedback condition and the positive feedback condition, and we found a significant index of moderated mediation (b=.0693, 95% CI [.0094, .1496]). High product commitment did not moderate the mediation effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation. However, we observed a significant moderation effect of product commitment on the relationship between perceived similarity and product evaluation when the commitment was high.

Our second comparison was between the no feedback condition and the negative feedback condition, and we also found a significant index of moderated mediation (b=-.2711, 95% CI [-.4644, -.0954]). The high commitment did not moderate the mediation effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation, but the low commitment did moderate the effect. Overall, these findings suggest that product commitment plays a significant role in moderating the relationship between perceived similarity and product evaluation.

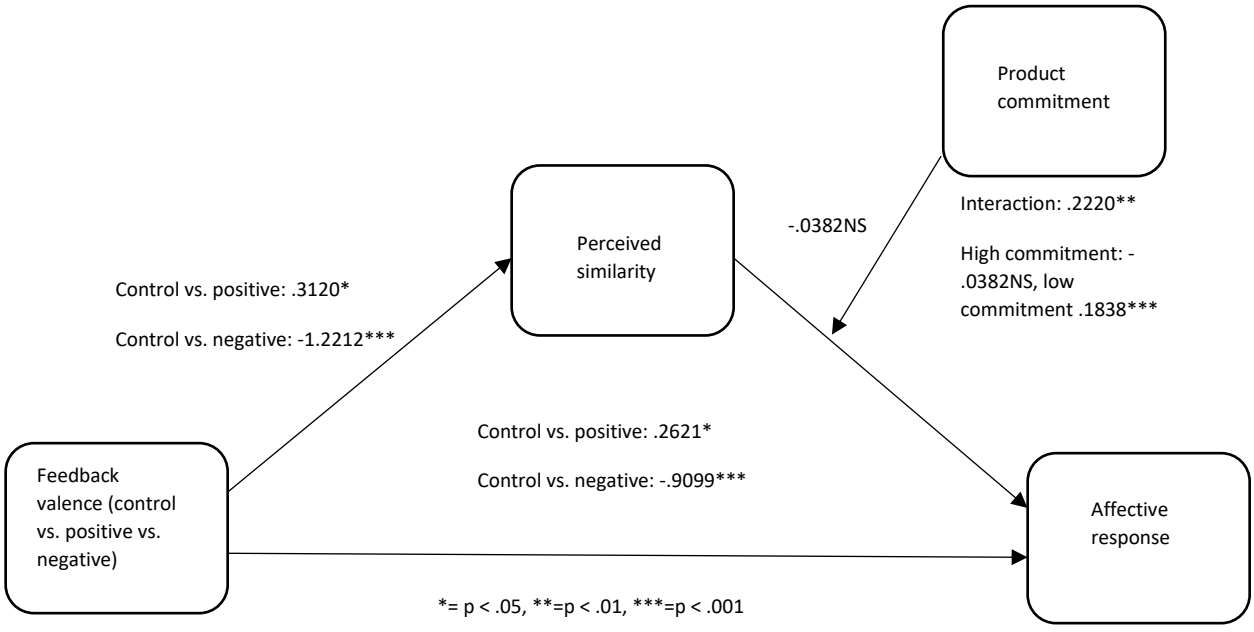


Figure 2.30: Moderated mediation on affective product evaluation: control as a reference group (Study 7)

Moderated mediation perceived similarity on affective response. We conducted moderated mediation analyses to test whether product commitment moderates the effect of perceived similarity, which mediates the effect of feedback valence on product evaluation (Hayes 2013, model 14, Figure 2.31). We focused on the comparison between the positive feedback condition and the negative feedback condition. The index of moderated mediation was significant (b=-0.3404, 95% CI [-0.5626, -0.1085]). High product commitment did not moderate the mediation effect of perceived similarity on product evaluation. However, we found a significant moderation effect of product commitment on the relationship between perceived similarity and product evaluation when product commitment was high.

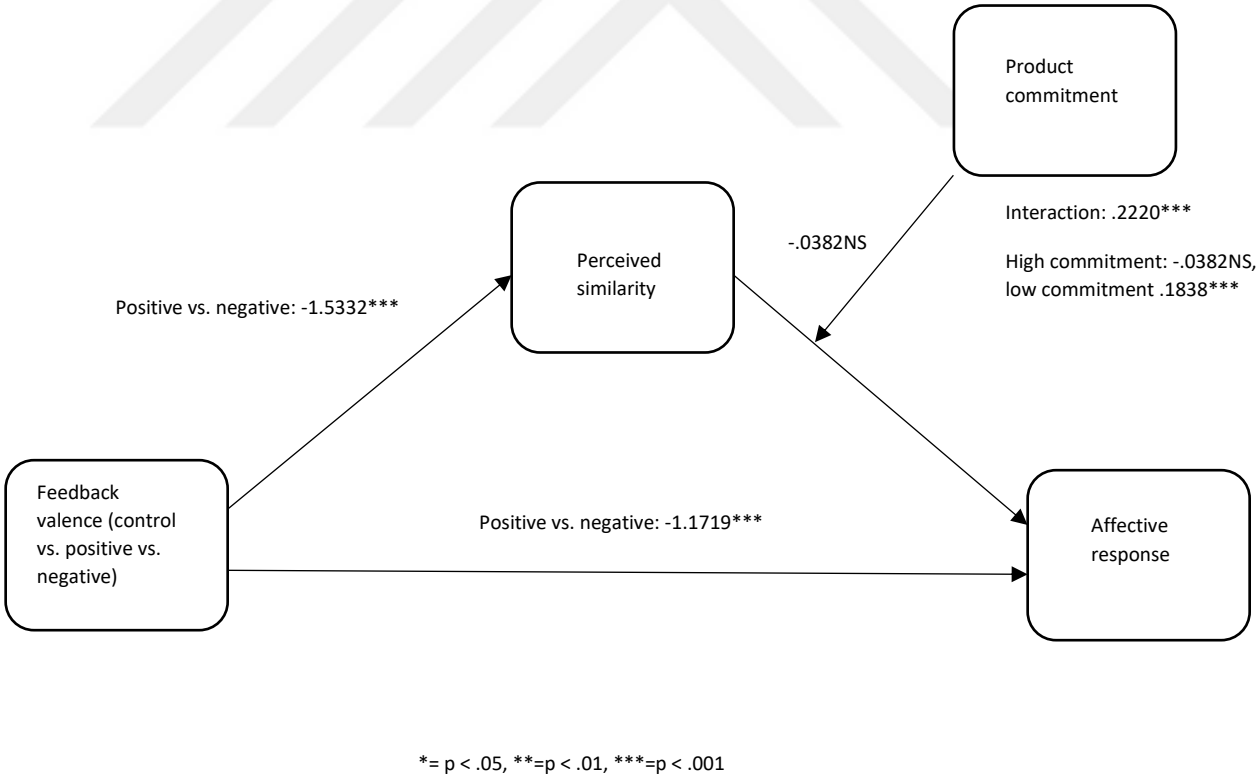


Figure 2.31: Moderated mediation on affective product evaluation: positive vs. negative (Study 7)

APPENDIX E: Statistical Information of Chapter 3

STUDY 1: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF MANIPULATION CHECK

	Negative Feedback	**Positive Feedback**
Manipulation Check	2.2115 (1.32475)	6.1908 (.77829)

EVALUATIONS OF THE RECIPIENT AND THE PRODUCT

	Positive Product Focused	**Positive User Focused**	**No Feedback**	**Negative Product Focused**	**Negative User Focused**
Recipient Evaluation	5.3973 (.62102)	4.9519 1.01276)	5.0143 (.80651)	3.6076 (.74382)	3.7753 (.69399)
Product Evaluation	7.9267 (1.29889)	7.9156 (1.04316)	7.4156 (1.22851)	3.9367 (1.93875)	4.1818 (1.90724)

STUDY 2: MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

EVALUATIONS OF THE RECIPIENT AND ATTRIBUTION

	Positive Product Focused	**Positive User Focused**
Recipient Evaluation	5.4507 (.57497)	4.6707 (1.19840)
Attribution	5.1712 (1.11249)	4.0600 (1.45184)

STUDY 3: MEANS

RECIPIENT'S CONTENT CHOICE

	Positive Product Focused	**Positive User Focused**	**Negative Product Focused**	**Negative User Focused**
Recipient's Content Choice	2.6000	2.4000	1.9839	3.0161

APPENDIX F: Manipulations of Chapter 3

Study 1

Control: Imagine Sam, who is one of your colleagues said: "I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics." Then you recommended the software you use.

Positive Product Focused: Imagine Sam, who is one of your colleagues said: "I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics." Then you recommended the software you think is working great. A couple of days later, you came across Sam. She purchased the software you recommended. She said: "Overall impression is quite positive. Wonderful presentations can be made, thanks to this software features! This software was so easy to adapt. It was very quick to end up with great results. Due to the product features, this software can become their most favorite. It is the software, that makes such a change in design!"

Positive User Focused: Imagine Sam, who is one of your colleagues said: "I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics." Then you recommended the software you think is working great. A couple of days later, you came across Sam. She purchased the software you recommended. She said: "My overall impression is quite positive. I can make wonderful presentations, thanks to my choice with this software! I adapted to this software so easily. I could quickly end up with great results. Due to my taste in design and pace in learning, this software can become my most favorite. It is the user, that makes such a change in design!"

Negative Product Focused: Imagine Sam, who is one of your colleagues said: "I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics." Then you recommended the software you think is working great. A couple of days later, you came across Sam. She purchased the software you recommended. She said: "Overall impression is quite negative. Any modest presentations cannot be made, due to this software features! This software was not easy to adapt at all. It was not quick to end with results. Due to the product's features, this software can become their least favorite. It is the software, that makes such a change in design!"

Negative User Focused: Imagine Sam, who is one of your colleagues said: "I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics." Then you recommended the software you think is working great. A couple of days later, you came across Sam. She purchased the software you recommended. She said: "My overall impression is quite negative. I cannot make modest presentations, due to my choice with this software! I did not adapt to this software easily at all. I could not quickly end up with results. Due to my taste in design and pace in learning, this software can become my least favorite. It is the user, that makes such a change in design!"

Study 3

Positive Experience: Imagine that you said to one of your colleagues, Sam: "I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics." Then Sam recommended the software she thinks is working great. You purchased the software Sam recommended. And you liked it very much. A couple of days later, you came across Sam. You gave feedback about the software.

Negative Experience: Imagine that you said to one of your colleagues, Sam: "I cannot decide on a software for designing illustrations and graphics." Then Sam recommended the software she thinks is working great. You purchased the software Sam recommended. And you didn't like it at all. A couple of days later, you came across Sam. You gave feedback about the software.

APPENDIX G: Scales of Chapter 3

Feedback Valence Manipulation Check

How would you evaluate Sam's feedback?

1 (Very negative)… 7 (Very positive)

Product Evaluation Scale

After receiving this feedback, please evaluate the software you have recommended based on the following dimensions.

1 (Not appealing at all)… 9 (Extremely appealing)

1 (Not good at all)… 9 (Extremely good)

Recipient Evaluation Scale

To what extent do you think Sam is...

Warm 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Tolerant 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Good-natured 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Kind 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Laid-back/easy to please 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Picky/hard to please 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Honest 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Have a balanced view 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Arrogant 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Sincere 1 (Not at all)… 7 (Very much)

Attribution Scale

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements. 1 (Strongly Disagree), 7 (Strongly Agree)

Sam thinks that this software is solely responsible for her experience.

Sam attributes her product experience solely to this software.

Recipient's Content Choice Sentences

Please use the statements provided to give your feedback. Please make sure to use exactly 5 statements. Drag and drop the statements you would like to use for your feedback. Please check the order of the statements, you can change the order by drag and drop.

Overall impression is quite positive. It is the software, that makes such a change in design! Wonderful presentations can be made, thanks to this software features! I can make wonderful presentations, thanks to my choice with this software! This software was so easy to adapt, and it was very quick to end up with great results. I adapted to this software so easily, and I could quickly end up with great results. Due to the product features, this software can become their most favorite. Due to my taste in design and pace in learning, this software can become my most favorite. It is the software, that makes such a change in design! It is the user, that makes such a change in design!

Overall impression is quite negative. My overall impression is quite negative. Any modest presentations cannot be made, due to this software features! I cannot make modest presentations, due to my choice with this software! This software was not easy to adapt at all, and it was not quick to end with results. I did not adapt to this software easily at all, and I could not quickly end up with results. Due to the product's features, this software can become their least favorite. Due to my taste in design and pace in learning, this software can become my least favorite. It is the software, that makes such a change in design! It is the user, that makes such a change in design!

APPENDIX H: Additional Variables and Measures of Chapter 3

Study 1

The impact of feedback content on product evaluations was not significant in this study. When recommenders receive positive feedback, they tend to evaluate the product more favorably compared to the control condition. When they receive negative feedback, they evaluate the product more negatively than the control condition. However, no significant difference was observed between the product-focused and user-focused conditions, regardless of whether feedback was positive or negative.

Product Evaluation. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using feedback type as the independent variable and product evaluation as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant main effect of feedback type ($F(4, 380) = 136.464$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .590$). There was no significant difference between the positive product-focused feedback condition ($M_{positive\text{-}productfocused} = 7.9267$, $SD = 1.29889$) ($F(1, 380) = .002$, $p = .964$, $\eta 2 = .000$) and the positive user-focused feedback condition ($M_{positive\text{-}userfocused} = 7.9156$, $SD = 1.04316$). However, participants evaluated the product less favorably in the control condition ($M_{control} = 7.4156$, $SD = 1.22851$) compared to the positive product-focused condition ($F(1, 380) = 4.228$, $p = .040$, $\eta 2 = .011$) and the positive user-focused condition ($F(1, 380) = 4.101$, $p = .044$, $\eta 2 = .011$).

There was no significant difference between the negative product-focused feedback condition ($M_{negative\text{-}productfocused} = 3.9367$, $SD = 1.93875$) ($F(1, 380) = .998$, $p = .318$, $\eta 2 = .003$) and the negative user-focused feedback condition ($M_{negative\text{-}userfocused} = 4.1818$, $SD = 1.90724$). However, participants evaluated the product more favorably in the control condition ($M_{control} = 7.4156$, $SD = 1.22851$) compared to negative product-focused feedback $F(1, 380) = 201.069$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .346$) and negative user-focused feedback ($F(1, 380) = 171.535$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2 = .311$). Without a control condition, a full factorial ANOVA on the product evaluation did not reveal a significant interaction effect ($F(1, 304) = .494$, $p = .483$, $\eta 2 = .002$).

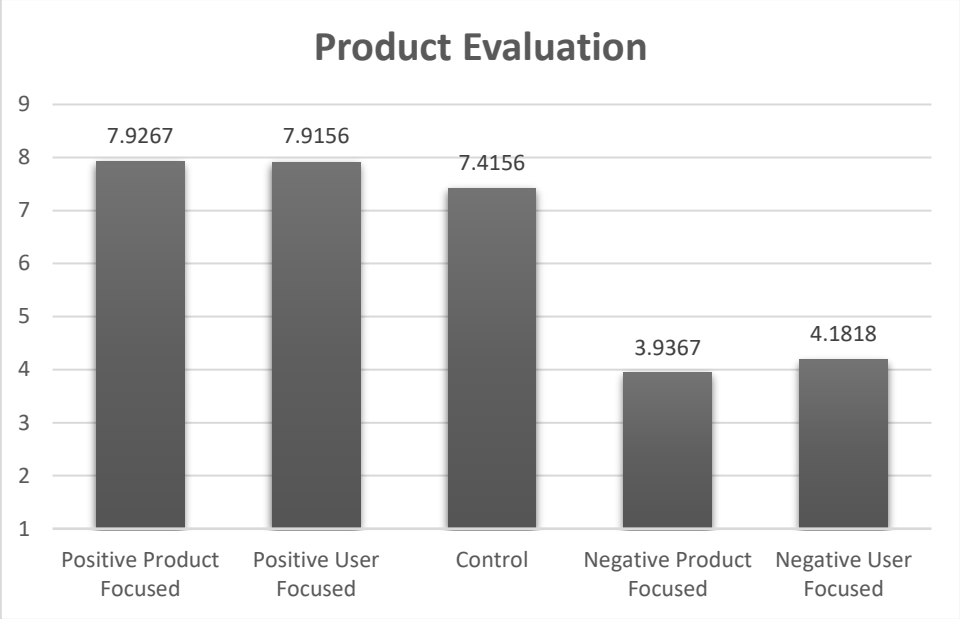


Figure 3.5: The effect of feedback type on product evaluation (Study 1)