Want to convince? Use abstract rather than concrete language

January 19 2010

When consumers talk to each other about products, they generally respond more favorably to abstract language than concrete descriptions, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"In a series of experiments, we explored when and why consumers use abstract language in word-of-mouth messages, and how these differences in language use affect the receiver," write authors Gaby A. C. Schellekens, Peeter W. J. Verlegh, and Ale Smidts (Erasmus University, The Netherlands).

In the course of their studies, the authors found that consumers who described a positive experience with a product (like a smooth shave with a new razor) used more abstract language when they had a positive opinion about the brand before they tried the product. "When consumers were told that the product was a brand they did not like, they used more concrete language to describe a positive experience. Thus, consumers use different ways of describing the exact same experience, depending on whether they use a liked or disliked brand," the authors write.

For a disliked brand, favorable experiences are seen as exceptions, and concrete language helps consumers to frame the experience as a one-time event, the authors explain.

On the receiver end, the studies showed that consumers responded differently to abstract and concrete language. "In our study of receivers, we gave consumers a description of a positive product experience, and

asked them to estimate the sender's opinion about the products," the authors write. "We found that perceived opinion of the sender was more positive when the description was cast in more abstract terms." For descriptions of negative experiences, the perceived opinion of the sender was more negative when the description used abstract language.

"Our finding that abstract messages have a stronger impact on buying intentions can be translated straightforwardly into the recommendation to use abstract language if you try to convince someone of the (positive or negative) consequences of buying a product, or of following your advice," the authors conclude.

More information: Gaby A. C. Schellekens, Peeter W. J. Verlegh, and Ale Smidts. "Language Abstraction in Word of Mouth." Journal of Consumer Research: August 2010.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Want to convince? Use abstract rather than concrete language (2010, January 19) retrieved 6 May 2024 from
https://phys.org/news/2010-01-convince-abstract-concrete-language.html