

Study shows popular people are influenced by others

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Marketers looking to tap into social influencers as a means to promote their products should recognize that popular people aren't always the trailblazers.

A new study by consumer behaviour researchers at the Richard Ivey School of Business on social networks and influence reveals the most popular people in such networks are more likely to follow trends set by others, even if they think they are leading the pack.

This contrasts with previous theories that people on the periphery of the network are most likely to be influenced by others to gain acceptance into the group and enhance their reputations.

The researchers studied two networks - a students' group and seniors' club - and found being central in a network is one way consumers can diffuse new information into a social network. However, they also learned the [social group](#) influences the consumer, too, a concept called "the opposing flow of influence". In other words, those who are perceived as being popular or central in a network are actually influenced by others in the group as they work to protect their coveted positions. They also found people's self-assessments of popularity are often at odds with views from the group.

Being central to a network, or a "broker," involves having many connections or perceiving yourself to have many connections. It also pertains to those who have friends from different groups and therefore

unite individuals who otherwise would never meet. Both types of brokers are able to influence others and are also susceptible to influence to maintain their status.

The study, “The Role of Network Centrality in the Flow of Consumer Influence”, is published in the latest edition of *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. It is authored by Seung-Hwan (Mark) Lee, a PhD student of Marketing; June Cotte, Associate Professor of Marketing and George and Mary Turnbull Fellow; and Theodore J. Noseworthy, a PhD student of Marketing, all from the Richard Ivey School of Business at The University of Western Ontario.

“Typically, we assume that people who are central in a social network will influence others - after all, we all want to do what the popular kids do. However, by understanding that the group [influences](#) the central actor, too, allows researchers and marketers to better predict behaviours of individuals in the network,” says Cotte.

“By highlighting important features about centrality and showing the different effects of the individual’s perception versus others’ perceptions; our findings could have ramifications in the political realm, business organizations and academic communities.”

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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