

Why do experts seek negative feedback to get motivated?

November 15 2011

Novices are more motivated by positive feedback than experts, who prefer a harsh critic, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"In our work, we asked: When is positive or negative feedback more effective for motivating behavior and changing attitudes as a function of a person's expertise level?" write authors Stacey Finkelstein (University of Chicago) and Ayelet Fishbach (University of Chicago).

Consumers commonly receive [positive and negative feedback](#) on their actions or habits. For example, doctors advise patients on how to improve their health or praise them for [healthy habits](#); the beauty industry provides feedback to consumers on what products and services they could use to improve their appearances; and fitness trainers give tips and praise to their clients. The authors looked closely at the ways beginners versus experts respond to negative or [positive feedback](#).

"In a series of five studies, we find that novices seek more positive feedback than experts and they respond more to this feedback as measured by their willingness to pay for future beauty services, donate to environmental organizations, and even in their evaluations of a media message," the authors write. They also found the opposite to be true: Experts sought and responded better to [negative feedback](#).

In one study, for example, the authors looked at students who were enrolled in beginning and advanced French courses. They discovered

that novices were more likely to change their behaviors if their instructors provided positive feedback on their progress. Meanwhile, the advanced students were more motivated after receiving feedback showing they had made insufficient progress.

"These findings suggest that to promote motivation and change attitudes, marketers should differentially target novices and experts," the authors conclude.

More information: Stacey Finkelstein and Ayelet Fishbach. "Tell Me What I Did Wrong: Experts Seek and Respond to Negative Feedback." *Journal of Consumer Research*: June 2012 (published online July 26, 2011).

Provided by University of Chicago Press Journals

Citation: Why do experts seek negative feedback to get motivated? (2011, November 15) retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-experts-negative-feedback.html>

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