

More easily influenced when we follow our heart

August 28 2012



When we let our hearts choose for us, we are more influenced by people who resemble ourselves, a PhD study from BI Norwegian Business School shows.

Every day we have to make a number of choices, and it is not always easy to know what the right choice is. That is why we often seek advice from others before making decisions. The Internet provides us with entirely new ways of finding out what other people feel about different products and services.

Many of us book hotel rooms online. Unless we are already familiar with the hotel, we will probably read reviews by former guests at the hotel before making up our minds. Such reviews are written by many different types of guests, families with small children, families with older

children, single travellers, older guests and many other groups.

If you are a 25 year old student, for instance, you might attach different weight to a review from a student of your own age (the reviewer is similar to you) than you would to the comments from a 60 year old professor (who is different from you).

Influence from those who are similar

In his PhD study at BI Norwegian Business School, Ali Faraji Rad has conducted seven experiments to see whether we are more easily persuaded by people who are similar to us than by people who are dissimilar to us. He also looked at what circumstance might make the differences greater.

In all the experiments, participants were asked to imagine that they were going to book a hotel room online, and that they were reading a review of the hotel they were considering. Participants were then given a negative [review](#) of this hotel, along with a profile of the reviewer. The profiles were designed to create a feeling of similarity or dissimilarity with the participant in the experiment.

"Participants were more influenced by reviewers who were similar to themselves than by reviewers who were dissimilar. This difference was greatest when the choice of hotels was based on emotions and not logic," explains Ali Faraji Rad.

Logic and feelings

In the first experiment, half of the participants were asked to use logic in evaluating the hotel, while the others were asked to base their evaluation on feelings. Those participants who based their evaluation on

feelings, were influenced by reviewers similar to themselves.

Similar reviewers had no influence on participants who chose their hotel room on the basis of common sense and logic.

In the second experiment, half the participants were asked to write down some thoughts on why it is good to use logic when making decisions, while the other half was asked to write about why it is good to use our emotions when making decisions.

In this way, participants were primed to base their choice on logic or emotions.

The second experiment showed the same results as the first one. Participants who used their emotions were influenced, while those who followed their sense of logic were unaffected by reviewers who resembled themselves.

Business or pleasure

In experiments 3 and 4, Ali Faraji Rad instructed half of the participants to imagine that they were going away for fun, while the other half thought they would be travelling with work.

Previous studies have shown that we are more likely to use our emotions when we travel for fun than if we have more functional motives (such as a business trip).

Those participants who were thinking of a trip for fun were, as expected, more affected by the similar reviewer than those who were told to imagine a business trip.

Near and within reach

One half of the participants in the fifth experiment were asked to evaluate the hotel and imagine that they would be travelling next week, while the others were told they would be going in a year's time.

Participants who thought they were going next week were more influenced by similar reviewers than those who were to travel in a year's time. "Our choices are more based on emotions when they concern the near future."

In the sixth experiment, half the participants were told to imagine they were in a lottery where the chance of winning the hotel package was 1 to 5, while the other half received much longer odds, 1 to 5000.

Participants with the best chance of winning were more influenced by the similar reviewer than participants with longer odds.

"With a good chance of winning we feel that the trip is within reach, and we base our choice more on feelings," says Faraji-Rad.

Information in one's memory

In the seventh and final experiment of the PhD study, half the participants had to remember a seven-digit figure while assessing the hotel. The other half only had to remember a two-digit figure.

Earlier research has shown that we are more likely to use our emotions when we have to retain too much information in our memory.

Those participants who had to remember the seven-digit figure were more influenced by the similar reviewer (than by the dissimilar

reviewer), even when they envisioned going on a business trip.

More information: Ali Faraji-Rad: [When the message feels right. Investigating how source similarity enhances message persuasiveness](#), Series of Dissertation 8/2012. BI Norwegian Business School.

Provided by BI Norwegian Business School

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