

Mars and venus go shopping: Does gender play a role in negative word of mouth advertising?

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When do you complain about a faulty product or a bad shopping experience? Do you tell your friends or does a total stranger hear the brunt of your rant? According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, it turns out that men and women engage in negative word-of-mouth advertising in very different ways.

"Negative word-of-mouth advertising is the most persuasive form of marketing communication. Whether or not you engage in this type of behavior depends on whether you are a male or a female, whether the person you are talking to is a close friend or just an acquaintance, and whether or not you are concerned about impairing your image (that is, admitting you are not a smart consumer)," write authors Yinlong Zhang (University of Texas, San Antonio), Lawrence Feick (University of Pittsburgh), and Vikas Mittal (Rice University).

The authors conducted a series of experiments to study the behavior of [men and women](#), asking them to recall a dissatisfying retail experience and indicate how likely they were to tell others about it. The researchers manipulated how the message was transmitted and also measured the varying levels of concern around what other people thought of them.

Results from one study showed that men were sensitive to impairing their image, but did not show any preference in who they complained to. If they had high concern about what other people thought of them, men

were less likely to complain at all. In contrast, females showed a remarkably different pattern. Only when they had a high concern about their reputation were they less likely to complain to strangers. Otherwise, women had a higher likelihood for complaining to close friends.

"Prior research has assumed that negative word-of-mouth transmission is largely a function of product performance, and that social factors play a negligible role. Our research, in contrast, shows that social factors—particularly those related to a person's gender—can crucially affect whether or not people will complain," the authors conclude.

"Moreover, there may be some product categories (fashion goods, for example) where people may be more concerned about their image and less likely to admit when something went wrong."

More information: Yinlong Zhang, Lawrence Feick, and Vikas Mittal. "How Males and Females Differ in Their Likelihood of Transmitting Negative Word of Mouth." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2014.

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