PHANTOM MENACE: THE EFFECT OF NARCISSISM ON WORD-OF-MOUTH COMMUNICATIONS

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Previous empirical research and anecdotal accounts suggest that “subclinical narcissism” or “average Joe’s narcissism” is one of the most prevalent social phenomena in many parts of the world. Research also suggests that there will be an unprecedented escalation “in average Joe narcissists” among future generations of consumers. The objective of this study is two-fold. The first objective of this study is to explore the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality on their word-of-mouth (WOM) communications. The second objective of this study is to explore the boundary conditions of the first objective.

The data were collected from a large number of consumers through Amazon Mechanical Turk. The results support many of the hypotheses accordant with the characteristics of the subclinical narcissistic individual. Specifically, the moderating effect of an individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait on the decision to engage in different types of WOM communications varies across the tested contexts.

This study is intended to respond to social scientists’ recent call for studies that investigate the fundamental motives behind the individual’s propensity to engage in WOM communication as a function of individual characteristics. The results of this study provide some prescriptive guidance to help companies target appropriate consumers to increase the effectiveness of WOM communication. In addition, this study explores the effect of individual and contextual differences on consumers’ willingness to engage in different types of WOM communication.
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By

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Narcissism is a personality trait characterized by self-centeredness, self-aggrandization and manipulative behaviors (Cisek et al. 2014). Derived from the Greek mythological character Narcissus, the handsome youth who was enraptured by his own physical self-reflection, narcissism as a psychological construct was largely studied in its pathological form (e.g., narcissistic personality disorder) and associated with non-normative behaviors such as sexual perversions. However, contemporary psychology has increasingly recognized narcissism as a personality trait that is more common and consistent with normal human development. The Pulitzer-prize winning author and historian Daniel Boorstin reified the impact of narcissism on contemporary society, asserting that "As individuals and as a nation, we now suffer from social narcissism. We have fallen in love with our own image, with images of our making, which turn out to be images of ourselves." Cast against Boorstin's assertion, the prevalence of narcissism is consistent with a stream of consumer research that focuses on self-related motivations in lieu of traditional classical economic perspectives. Consumers are increasingly driven by vanity, superiority and self-entitlement in lieu of traditional economic factors such as rationality, price equilibriums and utilitarian, market-driven consumption.

Today's consumer narcissists differentiate themselves with pretentious and prestigious branded offerings that reify their self-image vis-à-vis symbolic and materialistic consumption of products and services. While there remains widespread debate on the extent to which narcissism is a personality trait or disorder, and the extent to which it exists as a malleable
personality factor, there is little debate that narcissism is a socially-engendered quality of the consumer marketplace in which narcissistic individuals' interests in acquisition and consumption of prestigious product serve as mechanisms for creating individual supremacy relative to others (Campbell and Foster 2007).

This chapter provides an overview of two main research streams. The first one relates to the concept of narcissism, including two renowned theoretical frameworks that explain several aspects of narcissistic behaviors: the theory of social comparison and the theory of consumers’ need for uniqueness. The second research stream discusses the potential relationship between these theoretical frameworks on ensuing word-of-mouth communications consumer decision choices.

Narcissism

The phenomenon of clinical narcissism, which is characterized by an extensive sense of grandiosity and by a strong need to be validated and obtain attention or admiration from others, has been long recognized in psychology (Twenge et al. 2008). To date, the dynamic self-regulatory processing model (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001) is considered the best theoretical model that captures the essence of narcissism. According to this model, the core of narcissism is the internal vulnerable self-concept covered by the external self-proclaimed grandiosity operationalized through the dynamic self-regulatory processing model. The goal of the process is to continuously obtain the self-affirmation resources through external admiration and attention. Simply put, narcissists are those individuals who are completely self-centered, full of self-aggrandizing and self-absorption, yet easily threatened and extremely sensitive to the negative feedback from others. When being criticized or rejected, narcissists will retaliate by
showing aggressiveness, rage, and disagreeableness (Campbell 1999; Kressmann et al. 2006). A very interesting part of the dynamic of narcissism is the irony of narcissists’ behaviors. Due to narcissists’ internal insecurity about self-worth, narcissists will always depend on others for self-worth validation. Nevertheless, narcissists’ self-centeredness usually ends up destroying the very relationships narcissists most often depend upon (Dimanche and Samdahl 1994; Morf and Rhodewalt 2001).

However, the even more beguiling phenomenon is the unprecedented rise in subclinical narcissism or the average Joe’s narcissism where the lower degree of similar manifestations pervade in the general population. Typically, the average Joe narcissists tend to overrate their skills and accomplishments; perceive themselves not only as a center of attention, but being superior to others; daydream about their personal success and power to dominate and manipulate others; and expect special treatment (Thomaes et al. 2009). Enabled by the Internet and other accessible advanced technologies that allow average people to complete multiple tasks merely by swiping or clicking fingers, the rate at which this average Joe’s narcissism is spreading can be considered epidemic (Buffardi 2011; Twenge and Campbell 2009).

A meta-analysis (Twenge 2008) conducted to spot the trend of the subclinical narcissism in the general population suggests a pronounced rising trend starting in early 1980, not long after the term Generation Me sociological attribution started to appear in the literature (Lasch 1979; Wolfe 1976). Based on this trend, it is expected that society can expect to see more people, especially the younger generations, to become more self-centered. Society is moving toward the direction where “I,” “me,” and “mine” are more important than “we,” “us,” and “ours,” and much more important than “you,” “your,” and “yours” (Vangelisti 1990). The
biggest hint is the mega-success of social networking sites (SNSs) where users are encouraged to emphasize both self-promotion and self-admiration. The ubiquitous underpinning of these SNSs is the main factor contributing to acquired situational narcissism (ASN), the way in which narcissistic personality traits are developed as a result of an individual’s fame (Sherrill 2001).

As societies and subcultures manifest this societal tendency toward individuals' self-absorption, it invariably suggests that the number of average Joe narcissists will increase and their consumer behaviors will likewise impact the marketplace and marketing practice. Therefore, the systemic representation of average Joe narcissists as a meaningful segment of the consumer population has both normative and descriptive implications for marketing practitioners and researchers alike. For the marketing practitioner, how should marketers use resources to target products and services that capitalize on this growing consumer segment? From a theoretical perspective, how does social comparison theory balance individuals’ need for uniqueness and belongingness in the same social domain? These questions are addressed in several studies conducted in the present research.

**Theory of Social Comparison**

Because narcissism is a social phenomenon, to understand the phenomenon, a theoretical framework that can explain the dynamic of social interaction is needed. And because the hallmark of narcissistic personalities always involves comparing one against others, the theory of social comparison (Festinger 1954) is the one of most appropriate frameworks that can explain the behaviors of narcissists. According to this influential framework, people seek stable, precise, and accurate self-knowledge through several sources of information to evaluate their opinions and abilities. People tend to measure themselves against direct,
physical, and objective standards first, however; if such standards are not available, then people will compare themselves against others. Festinger’s (1954) similarity hypothesis states that to get a meaningful results from the comparison, people tend to compare themselves with similar others. If the difference in any given dimension between the two people is too much, the results can be unreliable, inaccurate, and useless.

Festinger (1954) also proposes that people, especially those from Western cultures, are motivated to compare themselves against slightly superior others in anticipation that the results from the comparison will lead to some improvement. People also use social comparison as a tool to serve several goals, such as self-evaluation, and self-improvement. To serve self-evaluation goals, people seek accurate self-knowledge; therefore lateral comparison is normally adopted. To serve self-improvement goals, people seek motivation, therefore upward comparison is normally adopted (Wheeler 1966). And in contrast, to serve self-enhancement goals, people seek comparisons with the inferior others. Therefore, downward comparison is normally adopted (Wills 1981). The direction of social comparison can lead to either positive or negative results. Festinger argues that while upward comparison can encourage people to improve themselves, it can also demoralize people when they discover themselves being inferior compared to others. Dimensions under evaluation play another important part in the social comparison process. The general rule is that when the dimension under evaluation is highly relevant, as opposed to not very relevant, to an individual’s self-concept: the results of the comparison will have more impact on that individual. And in such situations, people tend to make the comparison within a relatively narrower range of similar others to ensure the most accurate results. A study by Argo et al. (2006) shows that when people sense a threat to their
self-identities, they are willing to engage in deceptive communications to attenuate that threat. And this study also suggests that people perceive a bigger self-threat when the target of comparison is someone with a stronger social tie, e.g., close friend, co-worker, as opposed to someone with a weaker social tie, e.g., strangers. The dynamics of narcissistic personality heavily involve the process of social comparison. Narcissists feed on admiration from others (derived through comparisons) to reinforce the narcissists’ self-worth affirmation. Given that, whether it is done with consciousness, or lack thereof, social comparison is an inevitable process for driving the dynamics of narcissism based on the self-regulatory process model.

Narcissists believe, and also want others to believe, that they are superior, special, and unique. However, most of the time, narcissists’ claims about their superiority are based on unwarranted grounds (Campbell and Foster 2007). In such cases, for narcissists to maintain the impractical self-view, narcissists are more likely than non-narcissists to use social comparison to serve the self-enhancement goals. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that self-enhancement reinforcement leads increases the proclivity toward narcissists engaging in downward comparison rather than any other types of comparisons. By the same token, narcissists will be least likely to engage in upward comparisons. Narcissists will try to avoid engaging or being engaged in the comparison where they might end up being the inferior ones as it can trigger narcissists’ insecurity of their own self-worth. Given the manipulative and calculative nature of narcissists, they will try to create a situation in which they can almost always adopt downward comparisons when engaging in any social comparison settings. To achieve that objective, not only do narcissists have to create the situation in which garner the spotlight, but they have to ensure that no one can share the spotlight with them. Based on the notion of the theory of
social comparison, this study is designed to investigate the proposition that narcissists will try to do whatever it takes, including not sharing the information about the product, not recommending the product, or engaging in deceptive WOM communication, to ensure the effortless self-enhancement social comparison.

Need for uniqueness

Narcissists are those who hold unrealistically positive self-images, and who do not see themselves as ordinary, but special ones. For an individual to be considered special, by definition, embeds such qualities as rare and different; uniqueness is always implied. Thus, to narcissists, uniqueness is no stranger. And the concept of uniqueness can be considered as an extension of social comparison framework because something can be unique only when it is compared to others. Accordingly, to better understand the dynamic of narcissistic behaviors, need for uniqueness is another relevant and necessary framework. The concept of need for uniqueness states that everyone has a desire to be different from other people at a certain degree (Snyder and Fromkin 1977). Uniqueness is one way that allows people to express self-identity (Snyder 1992). Over time, the uniqueness and individuality are increasingly considered desirable, especially in the Western societies where individuals are often rewarded from being unique (Kim and Markus 1999). Snyder (1992) posits that people use consumption to express their self-identity, including uniqueness. According to Snyder, consumption becomes a pre-verified tool that allows people to express their uniqueness without being penalized for being too unique. Based on the aforementioned notion, Tian et al. (2001) extend the original framework of need for uniqueness and propose the framework of consumers need for uniqueness (CNFU). According to the CNFU framework, consumers have the need to pursue
differences relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer
goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing their self-image. Tian et al. (2001) also
propose three types of consumers’ need for uniqueness: (1) creative choice counter-
conformity, (2) unpopular choice counter-conformity, and (3) avoidance of similarity.

Although everyone is motivated to be unique, apparently, narcissists’ motivation (be
definition) would expect to be significantly manifested more than others. And since people
often use consumption as a means to express their uniqueness, unsurprisingly, narcissists find
this a perfect venue to serve their purpose of being perceived as special. Narcissists adopt
consumption as a means to validate their unrealistically positive self-images. According to the
Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo 1983), information can be communicated
using either central cues or peripheral cues. For narcissists to communicate the idea of being
superior or special through central cues, which is likely to be critically scrutinized, they must be
as good as they claim to be. Most of the prevailing research to date reveals that is not to be the
case. In contrast, narcissists can easily deliver the same message using peripheral cues, i.e.,
show off rare or unique items. Thus, for narcissists, purchasing and possessing expensive and
unique consumer goods is an opportunity to achieve the social image they want to project in
public (Sedikides et al. 2007). Given the need to maintain their uniqueness compared to others,
narcissists are motivated to ensure the uniqueness of the items they possess. Consequently, it
is reasonable to assume that narcissists are motivated to limit the exclusivity of their
possessions to be minimal.

Word-of-Mouth communication
Word-of-mouth (WOM) refers to a form of interpersonal communication among consumers regarding their direct experiences with a firm, a product, or a service (Richins 1984). WOM is one of the most effective marketing communications that can effectively influences consumer attitude and purchase intention (Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Katz and Lazasfel 1995; Keller 2007). While positive WOM can create positive attitudes across others, which may lead to an increase in purchase intention likelihoods, negative WOM can deter the consumers from buying, or even considering a product or a brand, thereby harming the financial performance and the image of the company (Holmes and Lett 1977). The prior research (Dichter 1966; Richins 1983, 1984) suggest several motivations to engage in WOM communication, including product involvement (as a way to relief the excitement from the use of the product); self-involvement/enhancement (as a way to gratify emotional need); other involvement (as a way to help others); and message involvement (as the way to discuss the thoughts elicited by the advertisement). However, most WOM researchers believe that product and/or service satisfaction is the main factor that carries the biggest influence on WOM engagement (Day et al. 1981). The conventional wisdom also suggests asymmetric influence of consumers’ satisfaction intensity based on the dissatisfied - satisfied continuum across the decision to proactively engage in WOM communications. Specifically, angry customers are more likely to engage in negative WOM communication than are their happy counterparts likely to engage in positive WOM (Richin 1983). Consistent with Richins (1983), companies have been trying to keep their customers satisfied in hope that doing so will encourage their customers to help spread good words (e.g. "likes" in Twitter language) about the companies or the products. Like the adage counsel “no news is good news,” companies are hopeful that satisfied customers will
help the companies maintain the status quo by not engaging in the WOM communications that might result in deleterious attitudes about a company or its market offerings. Nonetheless, things might not turn out the way they are supposed to all the time. Can companies always rest assured that as long as they keep their customers satisfied, these satisfied customers will not backfire on them? Is there any certain characteristic of consumers that compromises the merit of this conventional wisdom? More specifically, does the increase in the number of average Joe narcissists have an impact on this conventional model? Prior research shows that narcissists often engage in social interactions for self-enhancement purposes, and that self-enhancement is one of the important motivations that encourage people to engage in WOM communications (e.g., gaining attention, feeling like a market pioneer, suggesting status). Specifically, is it possible that average Joe narcissists want to maintain their specialness that derives from the use of the product by withholding product information or trash-talking the product so that others will lose interest in the product? This is the main question this present study seeks insights.

The present study

As articulated in the summary of the research to date, the overarching purpose of the current empirical research is to examine the effects of narcissism on WOM communication in various conditions and contexts. Precisely, this study is designed to examine how the individual’s level of narcissistic personality affects the likelihood of sharing product details, recommending a product, or engaging in negative WOM about a product. In this particular study, the individual’s level of narcissistic personality will be examined as a main moderator. The study is also designed to examine various boundary conditions to get more insights on such
moderation effect.

This study is organized as follow. In chapter 2, a review of literature on narcissism, social comparison, need for uniqueness, and word-of-mouth is discussed. Theoretical framework for the current study and hypotheses is developed and discussed in chapter 2. In chapter 3, the methodology, the way in which the four main studies are conducted is discussed. In chapter 4, the results from all four studies is analyzed in details. In chapter 5, the discussions, managerial implications, and the limitations is discussed.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of two main research streams. The first one relates to word-of-mouth communication, and the second one relates to the concept of narcissism, including two renowned theoretical frameworks that explain several aspects of narcissistic behaviors; those are the theory of social comparison and the theory of consumers’ need for uniqueness. Then it examines the relationships between these streams. Finally, based on these interplays, hypotheses are developed.

Word-of-Mouth Communication

Word-of-mouth (WOM) commonly refers to a form of interpersonal communication among consumers regarding their direct experiences with a firm, a product, or a service (Richins 1984). WOM may as well manifest in the form of sharing the third person’s consumption experiences (De Angelis et al. 2012; Donavan et al. 1999; Kamins et al. 1997). WOM is arguably one of the most powerful marketing communication strategies in influencing consumer’s attitudes and purchase intentions (e.g., Godes and Mayzlin 2004; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1995; Keller 2007). Research also suggests that both positive WOM and negative WOM can effectively persuade consumers’ behaviors and intentions (Arndt 1967; Richins 1984). Specifically, positive WOM can create positive attitudes toward a product and a brand, which in turn, increase the purchase intentions, especially during the product introduction of the products with high level of innovation (Arndt 1967; Dichter 1966). On the other hand, negative WOM can deter the consumers from buying, or even considering about a product or a brand, thus potentially
harming the financial performance and the image of the company (Holmes and Lett 1977). One important explanation of WOM’s effectiveness is due to the commercial-free atmosphere created through the communication. Despite being a stranger to each other, sharing personal knowledge among consumers creates a sense of trust and security that is difficult to offer through other forms of advertising and promotions (Day 1971; Dichter 1966).

Motivations to Engage in WOM Communication

Given the effectiveness of WOM on consumer behaviors, researchers have tried to scrutinize the process of WOM communication in hope to grasp the underlying mechanism, and to identify the determinants of consumers’ engagement in both positive WOM and negative WOM communications (e.g., Dichter 1966; Richins 1984). Dichter (1966) is one among the first researchers who attempted to identify the consumers’ motivations to engage in positive WOM. Those include product involvement (as a way to relief the excitement from the use of the product); self-involvement/enhancement (as a way to gratify emotional need); other involvement (as a way to help others); and message involvement (as the way to discuss the thoughts elicited by the advertisement). Later, Richins (1984) identifies the factors that motivate consumers to engage in negative WOM. Those are the company’s failure to provide appropriate complaint handling mechanisms; poor customers’ complaint responses; and perceived incompetent product repairs.

Sundaram and his colleagues (1998) adopt the critical incident technique (CIT) in their study, and they found significant relationships between consumption experiences and motivations. In the same study, they categorize consumption experiences into four groups. Those are (1) product performance, (2) response to product/purchase problem, (3) price/value
perceptions, and (4) employee behavior. They also categorize four motivations to engage in positive WOM: (1) altruism, (2) product involvement, (3) self-enhancement, and help the company; and four motivations to engage in negative WOM: (1) altruism, (2) anxiety reduction, (3) vengeance, and (4) seek advice. Many researchers suggest consumers generally engage in WOM communication after they realize that their expectations are not met (e.g., Anderson 1998). Given that average consumers tend to abide by the rule of loss aversion (Hardie et al. 1993), it is not surprising to find that the results from many studies suggest that consumers tend to engage in negative WOM rather than in positive WOM as the way to vent their vengeance (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Richins 1983; Wetzer et al. 2007).

Another way to resolve this asymmetry in the direction of WOM communication engagement is to look at it from the psychological perspective of the WOM sender. Many studies show that a lot of consumers who engage in the WOM communication have self-enhancement as the motivation (e.g., Dichter 1966; Sundaram et al. 1998). To achieve this goal, the WOM senders must perceive that their advice actually exerts some influence on those WOM receivers. Because the studies show that negative WOM tends to have more influence on consumers than positive WOM (Arndt 1967), so it is less risky for those who are motivated to achieve self-enhancement goal to engage more in negative WOM rather than positive WOM communication. However, a more recent study by Keller (2007) shows that the consumers engage in more positive WOM than in negative WOM when it comes to brands.

Based on findings from consumer behavior, sociology, and cognitive psychology research, Westbrook (1987) suggests that both consumption experiences as well as individual differences can become an important source that motivates consumers to engage in WOM
communication. Specifically, the process starts when consumption experiences, which serve as a stimulus, interact with the individual’s difference (e.g., personalities), resulting in affect, which in turn leads to variations in terms of direction (positive or negative) and intensity of WOM (Westbrook 1987). The prior research suggests that the consumers who identify themselves as “market mavens” tend to have higher motivation than average consumers to collect and share information about companies, brands, and products with others (Feick and Price 1987). These individuals are motivated by the sense of obligation to share information, the pleasure in sharing information, and the desire to help others (Walsh et al. 2004).

The social exchange theory and cost associated with the exchange of information during WOM communication can explain the likelihood of an individual engaging in WOM communication (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993; Homan 1961; Sahlins 1972). Homan (1961) posits that an individual’s likelihood to engage in WOM communication is driven by self-interest and the net values as a result of the social exchange activity. The motivation to engage in WOM communication from Homan’s (1961) point-of-view is consistent with the research described earlier (e.g., Dichter 1966: Sundaram et al. 1998). However, Sahlins (1972) posits that in addition to self-interest, social distance, or tie strength, between the parties of exchange can also influence an individual’s likelihood to engage in WOM communication. Built upon the argument of Sahlins (1972), and Frenzen and Nakamoto (1993), when a party of exchange holds valued information, the likelihood of that party engaging in the WOM communication to transmit the information to another party can be determined by the strength of social tie between the two parties. They further posit that the likelihood of transmitting the valued information will be higher when the social tie between the two parties is higher. In each social
exchange activity, not all parties of exchange will always end up with a positive net value after each exchange. In some cases, the costs associated with the exchange might exceed the benefit of such exchange. The average net value of exchange can only be realized in a series of exchange between parties. Therefore, the likelihood of engaging in the social exchange, in this case, transmitting valued information is higher when the social tie between the two parties is strong because both parties can expect that the loss, or gain, from the current or past exchanges will be compensated by the results of the future exchanges. Frenzen and Nakamoto also posit that as the valued of the information drops, the influence of the social tie strength will be diminished.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) refers to any positive or negative statements made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made publicly available through the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). eWOM is often referred to as “viral marketing” and “buzz marketing” (Porter and Golan 2006). The buzz agent As more consumers embrace and diffuse some newer technologies into their lives, inevitably, the eWOM communications are no longer limited to those generated through websites, forum, email, or instant messaging, but also through the more advanced Web 2.0 applications (Chu and Kim 2011). Internet-based applications that are built on Web 2.0 technology allow average consumers to create and exchange their user generated contents through various formats of online information-sharing, including social networking sites (SNSs) (e.g., Facebook), creativity works-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube), collaborative websites (e.g., Wikipedia), and microblogging sties (e.g., Twitter) (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Mangold and Faulds 2009). A study by Neilsen
Online (2009) shows that SNSs have already outran email as the most popular online platform where consumers connect with others to exchange information, opinions, and thoughts about products and brands.

Some major differences between the traditional WOM communication and the eWOM are that eWOM tends to be preserve more anonymity; that eWOM can be available to the public for an indefinite period of time; and that eWOM, more than its traditional counterpart, tends to be directed to multiple recipients (e.g., describing the experience with a product on the review section of a commercial website, or social networking sites vs. discussing the same experience in a neighbor’s living room) (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). eWOM becomes increasingly appealing because it is a combination of the path of the least resistance, cheap, and fast to reach the consumers (Trusov et al. 2009). In addition, eWOM appears to be more cost effective compared to the conventional methods of advertisement (Whitman 2006). Godes and Mayzlin (2004) investigate the usefulness of eWOM and suggest that consumers use eWOM as the proxies for the traditional WOM, and that, similar to how consumers benefit from traditional WOM, they rely on the information received through eWOM to make their decisions regarding the products, services, or the companies.

Motivations to Engage in eWOM

The results from the studies generally indicate that the motivations that drive consumers to engage in eWOM are not so different from those that drive them to engage in the traditional WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004; Ho and Dempsey 2010). In their study, Hennig-Thurau and his colleagues (2004) identify eight motivations for eWOM engagement. Those are platform assistance, venting negative feelings, concern for others, self-enhancement, social
benefit, economic incentives, helping company, and advice seeking. Another study by Ho and Dempsey (2010) categorizes the motivations to forward electronic content into three groups based on the fundamental interpersonal relations orientation theory (FIRO) (Schutz 1966). Those categories are inclusion (the need to be part of the group and the need to be different), affection (to show appreciation and concern for others), and control (the need to exert power in the one’s social environment).

Narcissism

Conceptualized based on the Greek mythology of Narcissus, a gorgeous man who obsessively fell in love with his own reflection in a pool and ultimately perished as a result of his self-absorption, narcissists are individuals who perceive themselves, and who want others to perceive them, as special, superior, and entitled and who are prone to exhibitionism and vanity (Sedikides et al. 2007). Wälder (1925) was the first one to articulate the concept of a narcissistic personality. He described individuals with narcissistic personality as those who condescend, feel superior to others, are preoccupied with themselves and with admiration, and exhibit a marked lack of empathy, especially in their sexual relationships, in which physical pleasure only, not together with emotional intimacy, is the main focus.

Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) may first start off as a psychological disorder that caught a lot of intentions from the famous psychologists such as Sigmund Freud (1914), and Adler (1917). Narcissism can be considered a psychological disorder when the level of narcissistic personality traits reaches extremely high on the narcissistic continuum (Twenge 2006). But recently, the subclinical NPD, or its less severe cases have been found to permeate the consumer culture (Lasch 1978; Twenge 2006) at the epidemic rate (Twenge and Campbell
Twenge and Campbell (2009) suggest that societies, especially the Western ones, are in the age of entitlement, the notion of “Generation Me” is one of the best supporting evidences. Consumers have been influenced and encouraged to become more self-centered oriented, and care less about others than ever before in the history (Buffardi 2011; Twenge et al. 2008). To respond to this prevalent phenomenon, the present study will limit its focus on narcissism at the subclinical level, which has been conceptualized in terms of a self-centered, self-aggrandizing, dominant, and manipulative interpersonal orientation (Emmons 1984; Paulhus 1998; Paulhus and Williams 2002).

The Emerging of Narcissistic Era

One main reason that makes researchers in social science start to pay more attention to this phenomenon is that there are evidences showing that the subclinical narcissism or the less severe narcissistic personality traits do occur in normal population (Emmons 1984). And most importantly, the manifestation of the self-centeredness among general population is happening at the epidemic level (Lasch 1978; Twenge and Campbell 2009; Twenge et al. 2008; Waugaman 2011). Many real life evidences suggest that we are now living in the age of entitlement. Today, it is not difficult to look around and understand why the social scientists believe they better refer to Gen Y (those born in 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s) as generation me (Wolfe 1976). The massive success of Social Networking Sites (SNS), i.e., Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, and YouTube, is the most apparent evidence that demonstrates how much people enjoy these self-promotion opportunities (Buffardi 2011; Buffardi and Campbell 2008). And since recently everything seems to involve the promotion of self-importance, and the representations of “Me, Me, and Me” (Twenge 2006). Twenge et al. (2008) also conducted a meta-analysis, using the
data collected by psychologists and other social scientists over more than one-quarter century. The meta-analysis investigated the empirical concordance of the data, assessing the standardized measures of personality or attitudes across effects. They assert that narcissism levels have been rising steadily over the past few decades. More specifically, they claim that today’s youth are more narcissistic than their older generations when they were the same age. So narcissistically entitled, the younger generations now abruptly establish the new system called juniority to replace the traditional seniority one (Waugaman 2011). However, Trzesniewski et al. do not agree that the proportion of general population with narcissistic personality traits is getting bigger over time. The authors further allege that there are several methodological issues that could potentially undermine the merit of conclusions drawn from the Twenge et al.’s (2008) meta-analysis. Specifically, Trzesniewski et al. (2008) point out that making inference about particular thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the entire population from college student sample is a major flaw. Notwithstanding the conflict between these two studies, as mentioned earlier, other visible evidence seems to be the reliable indicators that predict the growth of the individuals with non-pathological narcissistic personality traits. In fact, there are several factors that ensure that this increasing trend will continue.

Characteristics of Narcissists

The individuals with narcissistic personality traits can be described as those who possess highly inflated, unrealistically positive views of the self, which might be exhibited through strong self-focus, feelings of entitlement, and lack of regard for others (Campbell and Foster 2007; Emmons 1984; Paulhus 1998). Operationally, the subclinical narcissism is defined through the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) as a multifaceted construct consisting of seven
dimensions: (1) autonomy; (2) entitlement; (3) exhibitionism; (4) exploitation; (5) self-sufficiency; (6) superiority; and (7) vanity (Raskin and Hall 1979; Raskin and Terry 1988). Based on how the NPI is operationalized, it is obvious to see that narcissism is the social phenomenon that requires personal interaction as the main component (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). That is, narcissists cannot maintain their unrealistically inflated positive-self alone. The reason is that deep down under the grandiose self-views; narcissists have low self-esteem, or self-worth perception (Campbell et al. 2002; Kernberg 1975; Kernberg 1989). The real problem of narcissists is that they alone cannot maintain the stability of their optimal self-esteem level in order to move on with their lives. To maintain that level of self-esteem, narcissists constantly need external self-affirmation, which can come in the form of attention, admiration, and envy from others (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001).

The core of narcissism is the internal vulnerable self-concept covered by the external self-proclaimed grandiosity operationalized through the dynamic self-regulatory processing model. The goal of the process is to continuously obtain the self-affirmation resources through external admiration and attention (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001; Rhodewalt and Peterson 2008). Simply put, narcissists are those individuals who are completely self-centered, full of self-aggrandizing and self-absorbed, yet easily threatened and extremely sensitive to the negative feedback from others. When being criticized or rejected, narcissists will retaliate by showing aggressiveness, rage, and disagreeableness (Campbell 1999; Kressmann et al. 2006).

One complementary view of subclinical narcissism is based on the Big Five Personality Traits Framework (Paulhus 2001). Based on the research, the overarching personalities of narcissists are represented through high agency and low communion (Campbell et al. 2002).
This explains why narcissists are so obsessed with making themselves look and feel good. But they are not interested in creating and maintaining long-term or intimate relationship with others (Campbell 1999). The other complementary view of subclinical narcissism is based on attachment theory (Griffin and Bartholomew 1994). According to this theory, attachment style is the combination between individual’s perception of self and others, and narcissists are those whose style is the combination of positive perception of self and negative perception of others. Ironically, despite refusing to see the value of warm or intimate relationship, and feeling contempt and distrust for others and end up destroy every relationship they have, narcissists are unbelievably dependent on social relationships (Dimanche and Samdahl 1994; Morf and Rhodewalt 2001).

Causes of Narcissism

Based on literature in narcissism pathology, two of the most influential views regarding the origin of narcissistic personality disorder are from Kerberg (1975), and Kohut (1977). Kernberg’s (1975) view holds parental rejection and strictness as main causes of narcissism. According to Kernberg, narcissism is a defensive mechanism developed as a consequence of parental rejection, devaluation, and an emotionally invalidating environment in which parents are inconsistent in their investment in their children or often interact with their children to satisfy their own needs (Kernberg 1975; 1989). Constant parental loving is arguably the most important thing a child needs to develop the perception of self-esteem or self-worth, during the childhood period. However, due to the parental devaluation, the child’s perception of self-worth is inevitably lowered. Because individuals are motivated to protect, maintain, or enhance their self-esteem (Alicke and Sedikides 2009; Sedikides and Gregg 2008), consequently, the
child defensively withdraws and forms a pathologically grandiose self-representation. And this fantasized grandiose self-representation is created to serve as an internal refuge from the experience that reminds the child of the self-worthlessness (Sedikides et al. 2011).

The second view by Kohut (1977) holds that narcissism is the parents’ failure to allow children to experience optimal frustration. According to Kohut, a child can experience optimal frustration when he or she receives both constant parent supports and non-traumatic isolation that fosters reasonable struggling through life. This optimal frustration can be developed through primary dimensions: grandiose exhibitionism, and idealization. Over-parenting, which instills favorable sense within a child, can lead to grandiose exhibitionism. This is consistent with Adler (1985) who suggests overindulgence as another possible cause of narcissism. When being overly pampered, a child or even a grown-up might develop the unrealistically inflated value of self-worth and grow up with an impractically self-centered orientation mind. This might create some problems when engaging in the mature social relationships which reciprocities are required as the child might not be willing to negotiate his or her demands. On the other hand under-parenting, or parenting without enough guidance, makes a child feel isolation, leaving the child no model FIGURE to idealize and internalize. According to Kohut, only successful development of these two dimensions can moderate the sense of grandiosity to realistic levels. When parents fail in giving their child optimal frustration, the grandiose self will surface. And without idolized image of self or parents to internalize, a child will constantly seeks interpersonal feedback from others (Kohut 1977).

For the subclinical level of narcissism or narcissistic personality traits, researchers (e.g., Twenge 2006; Twenge and Campbell 2009) suggest five main causes: a focus on self-
admiration, child-centered parenting, celebrity glorification and media encouragement, the attention seeking promoted on the Internet, and easy credit. The emphasis on self-esteem and self-admiration movements during 1970s sets off the trend that creates “Generation Me.” During that time people were encouraged to conduct self-exploration, and self-expression. As people learned to emphasize individuality, becoming more self-centered (e.g., you must love yourself before you can love others), the culture gradually moved away from community-oriented values. This self-centered trend went on and affected all aspects of the societies. An intriguing example is the impact of this trend on religions. Since this trend emerged, the churches that have experienced growth are those that promote a very personalized form of religion (Twenge 2007, p 35). These churches exploit the notion of “God’s unconditional love” by encouraging people to fully express who they really are, and ignore what other people think about them because God still accepts them regardless. The self-admiration trend also tremendously changes parenting styles in many societies. Throughout their childhood, Generation Me has been repeatedly convinced by their parents that they are important, unique, and special. Having been overly pampered, Generation Me carries with them the inflated self-view, confidence, and great expectations, which most of time, only lead them to disappointments when engaging with reality (Adler 1985; Twenge and Campbell 2009).

When people are obsessed with the idea of self-centeredness, they do not have enough room for others. As a consequence, people tend to start a family later in their life because they are busy working on establishing their own self-identities, and that leads to significantly lower birthrates since more people start a family when it is too close to the limits of childbearing age (Twenge 2006). More importantly, when Generation Me have a relationship, they do not know
how to maintain it since they grew up focusing on themselves. It is difficult for them to maintain a long-term relationship where sharing and reciprocating are crucial. As a result, the divorce rate increases significantly. For the couples who have kids, through divorcing, they have established a perfect condition to foster narcissism in their kids (Cooper and Ronningstams 1992). This seems like a vicious circle that can worsen the problem. These sociological consequences are important to marketers who continuously track trends in family structure, household size and decision units as demographics, psychographics and lifestyle variables change over time.

The emergence of Web 2.0 technology allows average people to create and share their information with the online community, and this is one important factor that accelerates the self-expression trend (Buffardi 2011). Now anyone can conveniently become a star in his or her own show on the social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. TIME magazine named “YOU” as the person of the year in 2006 (Grossman 2006). With all the platforms and the spotlights accommodated by the SNSs, it is relatively much easier to become famous with virtually minimal effort. All people need is the intention to deliver the message “look at me” or “listen to me” and the confidence to share their personal stories or the courage to do something outrageous in front of the world (Samuelson 2006). Twenge and Campbell (2009) found that being famous has become the most desired goal for teenagers. This trend only contributes to the long-term problem because research found that narcissistic traits can be developed as a result of an individual’s fame (Sherrill 2001).

Robert B. Millman coins the term Acquired Situational Narcissism (ASN) to describe the development of narcissistic personality traits after an individual is granted with high positions
of power, such as movie stars, politicians, and professional athletes (Sherrill 2001). Based on the ASN scenario, an individual might start off as an ordinary person but later on achieve success in the career in which allows that individual to be treated like a celebrity. Justin Bieber is one the best examples of the ASN that emerged from YouTube (Konjicanin 2010). The case of Justin Bieber is among the extremely rare cases that achieve such an unprecedented level of enduring success (and more recently, failure) in the public persona. However, the very same mechanism that shoots Justin Bieber to the sky, i.e., the number of views on YouTube, the number of followers on Twitter, or the number of friends in Facebook, can create the perception of entitlement among the at-large population. All of those numbers inevitably enhance the individuals’ self-importance and entitlement (Buffardi 2011). Even though most people will not end up being like those Internet phenomena such as Perez Hilton, Susan Boyle, or Ray William Johnson, simply receiving the comments from friends on the pictures posted on their Facebook profiles can, little by little, make people develop the sense of self-specialness (DeWall et al. 2009). And over time, this self-specialness may evolve into narcissistic traits.

Twenge and Campbell (2010) argue that easy credit is another factor contributing to the spreading of narcissism among average consumers. As consumption becomes the norm of how individuals define themselves, and how they are defined by others (Belk 1988; Tuan 1980), unsurprisingly, consumers choose to invest a significant amount of money they have to define themselves. Twenge and Campbell (2009) that the inflated credits (e.g., instant credit card approval, easy loan or mortgage) are positively related to inflated self-image. Due to the relatively more convenient ways to be in debt than before, a lot of consumers now become addicted to pretending to own things they cannot really afford.
Narcissism and Self-Esteem

One concept that most researchers believe is the inherent association between narcissism and self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to a personal judgment of self-worthiness expressed through the attitudes one holds against oneself (Coopersmith 1967). As a human being, it is important for people to have self-esteem. The reason is that self-esteem is necessary as a protective shield designed to help people carry on with their lives despite the awareness that we all are just like a dust in the universe, destined only to die and decay (James 2011; Pyszczynski et al. 2004). One of the most widely used measurements of self-esteem, which conceptualizes self-esteem as a single-component construct, is Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg 1965) (Blascovich and Tomaka 1991). Another well-known approach to measure self-esteem is to adopt two-component scale that measures explicit self-esteem, and implicit self-esteem (Bosson et al. 2000). Explicit self-esteem refers to a deliberate, controllable evaluation of the self. Implicit self-esteem refers to an automatic, uncontrollable reaction to the self that must be assessed through unobtrusive method such as the Implicit Association Test (AIT; Greenwald et al. 1998) or Name-Letter Task (NLT; Nuttin 1985; 1987). Researchers believe that explicit self-esteem is a result of cognitive process while implicit self-esteem is a reflective of the intuitive and holistic process of individual’s experiences (Jordan et al. 2007).

One reason why self-esteem is of great interest among the researchers investigating narcissism is the inconsistent findings in the correlation with between two types of self-esteem and narcissism. Due to the similarity of the nature of the measurement items between NPI (Raskin and Hall 1979) (e.g., I think I am a special person) and RSES (Rosenberg 1965) (e.g., I feel that I have a number of good qualities), researchers found positive correlations between the
two measurements (e.g., Brown and Zeigler-Hill 2004). It is not difficult to see that people who believe they are special would also rate themselves as highly worthy. However, the interesting point is that despite the similarity of the nature of the items between the two measurements, the correlation value \((r)\) is not as high as most researchers expect. And the further investigation reveals that participants who score high on NPI get low scores on implicit self-esteem measurement (IAT) (Bosson et al. 2000; Jordan et al. 2003). These results suggest two things. First, the fact that the explicit self-esteem does not always correlated with implicit self-esteem suggests that people may be capable of having one attitude toward themselves on the surface while holding another attitude inside which is not consistent with the surface one (Bosson et al. 2000; Jordan et al. 2006). The second finding is that narcissism is not merely the reflection of explicit self-esteem, but rather the combination of high explicit self-esteem and low implicit self-esteem (Bosson and Weaver 2011). This view is consistent with the “mask model” of narcissism (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001). According to this mask model, narcissistic individuals possess positive, deliberate self-views that cover the unconscious feeling of shame and self-doubt underneath (Akhtar and Thomson 1982; Morf and Rhodewalt 2001).

Built upon the notion of the mask model, the concept of individuals with fragile high self-esteem or incongruent high self-esteem refers to those whose attitudes toward the self are unrealistic, weak-anchored, and vulnerable to threat (Kernis 2003). To maintain the stability of the self-esteem, these individuals need constant validations of their self-worth from various sources, including from themselves sometimes through self-deception. As a consequence, these individuals will be self-aggrandizing and defensive because they are preoccupied with the idea of protecting and enhancing the self-esteem (Zeigler-Hill and Jordan 2011).
Narcissism and Consumer Behavior

Today in many societies, reality and meanings can be perceived through symbols and signs (Baudrillard 1992), and symbolic consumption becomes the norm of defining an individual’s self (Dimanche and Samdahl 1994; Solomon 1983). Because for narcissists, silently screaming “Look at me!” or “See me!” is what they have always been obsessed about. It is not a surprise that symbolic consumption has become a practical means for narcissists to their ends (Sedikides et al. 2007). Based on the main characteristic traits of narcissism, such as grandiosity, entitlement, need for affirmation, arrogance, envy, and exploitation, there exists a requisite interaction with other person to perform, reinforcing that the manifestation of narcissism is a social phenomenon (Clifton 2011). All of these characteristics have one common goal: to constantly reinforce the narcissistic individuals’ self-inflated specialness, which, in turn helps regulate their optimal levels of self-esteem, eventually (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001).

The following discussion will summarize the basic framework of how narcissists adopt symbolic consumption as a part of their strategies to deceive and elicit attentions, admirations, envies, and exploitation opportunities from others, which, in turn, become source of self-affirmation that narcissists use to regulate their optimal level of self-esteem.

Due to the internal insecurity of their self-worth, narcissists have to think positively about themselves, i.e., I’m better than others (Campbell et al. 2002). And due to the very same internal insecurity issue, their self-reinforcement of the self-positive ideas are not deemed credible enough; therefore, two alternative reinforcements from others are of extremely importance to narcissists (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001). Sedikides et al. (2007) argue that making others acknowledge and truly respect an individual’s superiority is extraordinary difficult, and
most importantly, it takes time. Ironically, even as full of themselves as they normally believe, narcissists do realize this hindrance. Nevertheless, perceiving themselves as special individuals, narcissists believe they deserve immediate acknowledgement, and thus they prefer taking shortcuts. And that shortcut is to go through symbolic consumption, which is considered easiest and arguably very effective strategy (Vazire et al. 2008).

The discussion above regarding the shortcuts are apparently preferred by narcissists is consistent with Henrich and Gil-White’s (2001) study regarding how status in the work place is formed. According to Henrich and Gil-White, a within-group status can be formed from two different bases; the prestige based, and the dominance based. The prestige based form of status is achieved by virtue of the wisdom, and genuine superiority of an individual. This form can be analogous to the regular route of earning acknowledgements and respects through the regular way. In contrast, the dominance based form of status is achieved by wielding power, creating fear in others by threatening to withhold the resources. And this form can be analogous to the shortcuts mentioned above. Although prestige may be the more respected route to social influence in many contemporary social hierarchies, dominance is deemed equally effective (Henrich and Gil-White 2001). Research found that narcissists who, by definition, are likely to overestimate their intelligence and capabilities (Gabriel et al. 1994), tend to adopt the dominance form of status to emerge as leaders in social groups (Brunell et al. 2008; Rosenthal and Pittinsky 2006) despite their poor expertise and leadership skills and being disliked by their peers (Paulhus 1998).

The above discussions suggest that in most circumstances, narcissists would prefer the shortcuts to the regular routes to earn acknowledgements from others. This explain why
narcissists normally appear in public wearing expensive, flashy, neatly kept clothes (Vazire et al. 2008); explicitly exhibiting the latest, high-prestige items (Richins 1994); or driving fancy cars (Kressmann et al. 2006). All of these exhibitions, one of the main characteristic traits of subclinical narcissism, are the prologue to the strategies aimed at attracting and eliciting attentions, and, eventually, admirations from others on the spot. As more societies become more capitalistic over time, possession of materials has increasingly become the point-of-reference in determining one’s happiness and success (Fournier and Richins 1991). In many cultures that value economic accomplishments, conspicuous consumptions, such as purchasing of high-prestige products or brand names is considered self-enhancement of agentic attributes (Ryan 1993; Zhang and Shrum 2009), the attributes that are highly valued by narcissists (Campbell et al. 2002). And for an individual, as a consumer living in such capitalistic culture in which information overload is inevitable, brand names become arguably useful not only to help attenuate the choice complications (Jacoby et al. 1974; Malhotra 1982), but also to be used for snapshot evaluation of the status that the brands entail (Han et al. 2010; O’Cass 2004; Olshavsky and Granbois 1979). Aspired by wealth and fame, narcissists are prone to desire for material possessions (Cohen and Cohen 1995), and brand names (Sedikides et al. 2007). In summary, the ways that individuals in the capitalist cultures are judged provide an avenue through which narcissists can easily elicit the kinds of response they seek. That is, narcissists are perceived as particularly attractive at first sight because they are brand name consumers (Sedikides et al. 2011).

This narcissists’ attractiveness at the first sight can also be explained by using the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo 1981). According to this model, when there
is not enough information to be processed through the central route, people will automatically switch to the peripheral route, and start gathering the available peripheral cues. At first sight, unless the individual is well-known, there is virtually no way the regular people can have enough information of any stranger to be processed through the central route. Therefore, inevitably, the available peripheral cues will be used in the process to form attitudes toward that individual. And normally, the next best thing available as the peripheral cues are nothing but the individual’s extended self, in other words, individual’s possessions (Belk 1988). This confirms the importance of symbolic, specifically, brand names to narcissists.

However, even though the narcissists might be successful in eliciting attentions and admirations at the first sight, or at zero acquaintance, those tend to be only temporary (Vazire et al. 2008). In terms of personal relationships, narcissists become disliked by others over time because of the very same traits that first make them seem very attractive (Back et al. 2010; Paulhus 1998). Because of their characteristics, which is the combination of extremely high in agentic traits, i.e., grandiosity, entitlement, need for attention, arrogance, envy, and exploitative, but low in the communal traits, i.e., lack of agreeableness, kindness, warmth, and empathy (Campbell et al. 2002), the relationships with narcissists tend not to last long (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001). Research found that narcissists are inclined to engage in impulsive behaviors that provide short-term rewards but have long-term costs (Vazire and Funder 2006). That is, narcissists can be described as those who are not hesitate to pick the option of getting ahead at the expense of getting along (Tracy et al. 2011). And because of their ongoing selfishness, and aggressiveness, narcissists cannot manage to develop long-term, or intimate relationships with others, thus do not get affective support in long run (Back et al. 2010).
However, research also found that may be the reason behind the short-term relationship oriented of narcissist is a part of defensive mechanisms to prevent the risk that entails the developing too close relationship with others (Back et al. 2010). By letting others come too close to narcissists, their true vulnerable self might be revealed. And that is considered one of the biggest threats to narcissists. And since most of the relationships that narcissists have tend to be short-term in nature, it follows that the only kind of feedbacks narcissists get from others tend to be the positive ones (Back et al. 2010). Because most of the relationships will be ruined before narcissists become disliked by others, who, by that time, certainly have a lot of negative ones to drop. This suggests that there is possibility that narcissists might not realize about their undesired personalities.

Nevertheless, given that narcissist desperately seek for the self-affirmation from others, yet, they tend to ruin every relationship they depend upon (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001). Because of this paradox, and the notion that the sense of self-affirmation must be constantly reinforced (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001), continuously getting themselves into the zero acquaintance situations, in other words, continuously searching for the brand new potential victims as their uninterrupted supply for self-affirmation is of an extremely significance to narcissists. So long that narcissists’ self-esteem level is unstable, this vicious circle will never stop. And when the whole cycle restarts from the zero acquaintance, brand names products will, again, take the lead role in helping narcissists getting their ways out of this situation.

Since narcissism is described as an emerging social phenomenon (Twenge et al. 2007), which implies a lot of continually social interactions. It is important to review some theoretical frameworks that are built upon, and can explain the dynamics of social interactions to
understand how these dynamics relate to the narcissists’ behavioral scope under the study. To that end, the following sections are dedicated to two important social psychology frameworks, namely social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), and need for uniqueness (Snyder and Fromkin 1981).

Theory of Social Comparison

Because of its impacts and influences on the social psychology and beyond, the researchers have regarded social comparison theory proposed by Festinger (1954) as the social psychology's second favorite theory for longer than half a century (Arrowod 1978). The main idea of the theory states that people use others as the source of their self-knowledge. According to the original social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), people are driven by fundamental human nature to seek knowledge about their own opinions and abilities. Festinger postulates that people will first strive to measure their opinions and abilities against objective, direct, physical standards as the point of reference. However, in the situations where those objective standards are not available, to serve the need to evaluate their opinions and abilities, people are forced to switch to the more subjective point of reference. Specifically, when the objective standards are unavailable, people will compare their opinions and abilities with those of others. Festinger considers accurate evaluation results from the comparison very important. Because holding incorrect or inaccurate ideas about one’s abilities can lead to undesired consequences, Festinger suggests that rational and unbiased people will strive for stable, precise, and accurate self-evaluation.

The Similarity Hypothesis

Based on this notion that people strive for stable, precise, and accurate self-view,
Festinger proposes the similar hypothesis, which states as follows: The tendency to compare oneself with some other specific person decreases as the difference between his [or her] opinion or ability and one’s own increases (Festinger 1954, p. 120). This simply suggests that people prefer to compare themselves with similar others. Because the most reliable comparison would be the one in which people use the objective standards as the point of reference, when the objective standards are missing, to reach the point where a meaningful comparison can still be made, people will search for the next most reliable point of reference. That is, something, or in this case someone that people have the most knowledge about. Festinger’s assumption here is that people are supposed to know everything about themselves, including all attributes, the best. Thus, comparing their attributes of interest against those of someone similar to them is a reasonable way to establish a next best reasonable common ground for the comparison where a solid objective ground is unavailable. Festinger suggests it is counterproductive for people to compare themselves with someone dissimilar or too different because the results of the comparison might remain unclear and meaningless. For example, it is unlikely that a novice chess player will end up with an accurate self-evaluation in terms of his or her chess playing skill when the comparison is against a professional chess player. In addition, making a comparison requires people to spend their cognitive resources. Given that people have constant needs to maintain accurate self-view, and that people are cognitive misers (Taylor 1981), comparing themselves with someone similar (e.g., best friend, or classmates) is an efficient way to spend scarce cognitive resources (Corcoran 2011). Further, researchers (e.g., Tesser 1986) found that the similarities between of the dimensions being compared have positive relationship with the impact of the evaluation results. That is, the results from the
comparisons with others who are similar on several dimensions have more impact than those from the comparisons with others who are similar on one dimension. In sum, comparing themselves with those similar to them enables people to gain diagnostic information about their self-evaluation and also the confidence that their evaluation results will be reasonably stable, precise, and accurate. Nevertheless, Festinger does recognize that people may be biased when engaging in social comparison, by and large, depending on the current motivation behind the engagement (Corcoran et al. 2011).

Motivations to Engaging in Social Comparison

Besides the fundamental human nature that drives people to seek knowledge about themselves, in this case, through comparing with others, the literatures in social comparison suggest three categories of people’s motivations to engage in social comparison: self-evaluation, self-improvement, and self-enhancement (Wood 1989). Different motivation will affect the directions of comparison, and the dimension under evaluation. Fundamentally, people with self-evaluation motivation will engage in lateral comparison to gain an accurate self-knowledge and their stand on any given dimensions. People with self-improvement motivation will engage in upward comparison to feel inspired (Wheeler 1966). And for people with self-enhancement motivation will engage in downward comparison to make themselves feel superior to others (Wills 1981).

Self-Evaluation

Since people always have basic needs for a stable and accurate self-view, however; not always that the objective standards against which people can measure their abilities will be available. Therefore, self-evaluation is arguably the most fundamental motive that drives
people to engage in social comparison process (Festinger 1954). However, people’s fundamental nature to compare themselves with other seems more powerful than merely to find a way to substitute objective standards because people appear to constantly engage in social comparison even when objective standards are present (Klein 1977). This suggests that the reason that people engage in the social comparison is based only on self-evaluation motive, but also on self-improvement, and self-enhancement (Wheeler 1966; Wills 1981).

If the motivation behind the engaging in social comparison is to achieve self-evaluation goal, people are likely to seek the accurate knowledge about self through the similarity hypothesis. People will use similar others as comparison standard because doing so allows them to effectively gain diagnostic information for their self-evaluation. Specifically, when evaluating ability, people will seek to compare themselves with someone whose ability is similar to their own (Festinger 1954). When the dimension under evaluation is familiar to the people who want to gain their self-knowledge, they will select the target of comparison whose rank-order is close to them (Wood 1989). However, if the dimension under evaluation is not familiar to the people who want to gain self-knowledge, they will try to find out the potential range from others whose rank-order they perceive to be the highest, and the lowest (Wheeler et al. 1969). Subsequently, when the people who were once unfamiliar with the dimension under evaluation become more familiar with it, they will then adopt the similarity hypothesis by selecting the target of comparison whose rank-order is close to theirs to gain an accurate knowledge regarding their stands.

Self-Improvement

Besides the similarity hypothesis, Festinger (1954) also postulates the unidirectional
drive upward upon recognizing people’s needs for self-improvement. Festinger and many researchers (e.g., Wheeler 1966) notice that Western culture plays an important part in pressuring people to continually improve themselves. For this group of people who are highly motivated to achieve a goal, comparing themselves with someone similar but slightly better is likely because this upward comparison serves the model that inspires people to improve themselves (Festinger 1954; Wheeler 1966). Specifically, in upward comparison scenario, people who aim to improve themselves will compare their abilities in dimensions of interest with those of someone that are considered slightly better. In this case, the notion of slightly better is interesting as it also incorporates the notion of similarity hypothesis at the same time. Like in the case of self-evaluation, people with the goal of self-improvement also seek to compare themselves with similar because of two main reasons. The first reason is to gain a reasonably accurate self-knowledge, which in turn, allows people to draw meaningful evaluation results regarding their abilities from the comparison. The Second reason is to maintain the reasonable amount of encouragement to improve. Wheeler (1966) points out that upward comparison, despite being regarded as a way to foster self-improvement, involves a risk of self-demoralization since people are forced to face their own inferiority during the process. Specifically, on one hand the similarity hypothesis plays a crucial role in enabling people to feel that they are similar to those better others, implying that they have the potential to reach the same level as those better others. On the other hand, the perceived similarity between themselves than the better others can hurt people’s self-esteem since it makes people’s inferiorities manifest. Many researchers found this demoralization is not the case when people perceive that the dissimilarity is obvious, i.e., average people comparing
themselves with professional athletes or movie stars (Cash et al. 1983; Wheeler 1966; Wood 1989). Other researchers also suggest that the performances of people improve in the presence of someone whose performance is slightly better, but their performances are not affected in the presence of someone whose performance is much higher than theirs (Seta 1982).

Self-Enhancement

This motivation to engage in social comparison process comes from people’s need to maintain positive self-view. Based on the original theory, Festinger (1954) does not discuss much about this type of motivation since Festinger emphasizes on gaining accurate information regarding self-view as opposed to biased information in the self-serving manner. People frequently engage in social comparison even when solid direct objective standards are present is another evidence suggesting that people are biased and often use the process of social comparison in the self-serving manner (Klein 1977). Wills (1981) found a lot of evidences suggesting that when people experience misfortune or threat to their self-esteem, they seek the comparison with inferior others. The literature suggests when people engage in social comparison process with a motivation of self-enhancement, they become particularly strategic in selecting both the target of comparison, and the dimension under evaluation (Wood 1989). For example, people with an undesirable dimension tend to see others as having some kind of undesirable dimensions like them. However, people with a desirable dimension tend to see themselves as unique in their superiority (Brown 1986; Campbell 1986). Fundamentally, people with desirable dimensions will compare themselves with inferior dissimilar others to maximize the self-enhancement effect while people with undesirable dimensions will compare themselves with similar others who also have undesirable dimensions as a way to justify their
own misfortune (Wood 1989). A researcher found that if people are not satisfied with the outcome of the comparison in the dimension under evaluation, such as academic performance, they might seek another dimension in which they believe they are superior to their comparison target, such as physical appearance, to make themselves feel good (Miller 1982). Other studies suggest that the drive to keep maintaining positive self-view is so strong that sometime it can drive people to intentionally avoid social comparison (Brickman and Bulman 1977), or even engage in downward comparison with imaginary inferior others (Taylor et al. 1983). Festinger (1954) also recognizes that self-relevance also influences the way to which people satisfy their self-enhancing goal. That is, people’s emotional responses to the comparison results are larger on the dimensions that people consider high self-relevant.

Need for Uniqueness

Based on the original framework of need for uniqueness (NFU) proposed by Snyder and Fromkin (1977; 1980), despite the need to conform, all individual occasionally wants to be, to a certain degree, unique, or different from others from time to time. However, depending on each individual’s level of comfort when engaging in typical social interactions; the degree of uniqueness can range from one extreme, “just like everybody else” to the other extreme, “just one of a kind.” Snyder and Fromkin (1977) suggest that although some individuals with high uniqueness are willing to demonstrate their unique behaviors and risk social approval, after all, the need for uniqueness is usually constrained by the desire for social assimilation and approval. Thus, most people will prefer to avoid staying on both two extremes because both high level of similarity and high level of dissimilarity can be perceived as unpleasant, which in turn, leads to the reduction of self-esteem (Snyder and Fromkin 1980). This is consistent with
the Brewer’s (1991) Optimal Distinctive Theory which states that all individuals are motivated to find an equilibrium point between two opposing needs: the need for assimilation and the need for differentiation. The need for assimilation motivates individuals to fit in while the need for differentiation motivates individuals to stand out. Each individual will have different equilibrium point. The extent to which the equilibrium point leans toward either the need for assimilation or the need for differentiation will reflect through that individual’s behavior. On one hand, if the equilibrium point receives too much influence from the need for assimilation, an individual might suffer from low self-esteem. On the other hand, if the equilibrium point receives too much influence from the need for differentiation, an individual might suffer from social rejection. Similar to Snyder and Fromkin, Brewer (1991) also suggests that most individuals seek to maintain their uniqueness without provoking a negative response from the society.

Based on the notion of “we are what we have and possess” (Tuan 1980), and the notion of “extended self” (Belk 1988), individual’s consumptions become a significant source of individuals’ self-definition in Western cultures. Consequently, consumption provides a venue for individuals to express their uniqueness (Snyder 1992). Consumption becomes a pre-verified vehicle that allows individuals to express their uniqueness and at the same time keep those individuals from social rejections. The phenomenon that individuals increasingly seek rewards through consumptions that promote differences has become common especially in Western societies where uniqueness and individuality are considered desirable attributes (Kim and Markus 1999). With the goals to examine the emerging trend and to take the original framework by Snyder and Fromkin to another level, Tian et al. (2001) set out to establish the
framework of consumers’ need for uniqueness (CNFU). Accordingly, CNFU is defined as “the trait of pursuing differences relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one’s self-image and social image” (Tian et al. 2001, p. 52). Based on the framework of CNFU, individuals’ need for uniqueness manifests itself in their pursuit of material goods to distinguish themselves from others. There are three types of consumer behavior according to CNFU: (1) creative choice counter-conformity; (2) unpopular choice counter-conformity; and (3) avoidance of similarity.

Creative choice counter-conformity refers to the behaviors of those who purchase products that express their uniqueness, but still acceptable to others. An example of this type is brand name products since they offer some distinguishable attributes and some creativity, which in turn, lead to the favorable social evaluation (Snyder and Fromkin 1980). Unpopular choice counter-conformity refers to the behaviors of those who are willing to risk social disapproval by buying the products that deviate from the norm, or unpopular products to establish the uniqueness. Avoidance of similarity refers to the behaviors of those who tend to select the products that are not likely to become too popular, and also withdraw from buying products that become too popular.

The Present Study

The epidemic of subclinical narcissism among the general population, with the supports from advanced technologies, will quickly exert more influences on virtually all aspects of the society. Given how much impact this escalating trend will have on consumer behavior, the present study is highly relevant. The objective of the present study is to understand the effects of narcissism on WOM communication, including how it can affect the decision to engage in
WOM communication and its boundary conditions that can affect such decision. As previously discussed, the grandiose self-belief of narcissists can be achieved only through social interactions. Therefore, to investigate the underlying mechanism that drives narcissistic behaviors, the present study relies heavily on two main theoretical frameworks borrowed from social psychology to explicate the dynamics of social interactions: the theory of social comparison (Festinger 1954), and need for uniqueness (Snyder and Fromkin 1980; Tian et al. 2001). The following section is dedicated to elaborate how these two frameworks can be applied to investigate the relationship between narcissistic behavior and WOM communication.

As described earlier in this chapter, narcissism can be seen as dynamic self-regulatory strategy in which maintaining and enhancing inflated self-view by constantly using social affirmations is the main objective (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001. Due to the nature of narcissists, it is reasonable to assume that narcissists’ main goal of engaging in the social comparison process is self-enhancement. Since narcissists are occupied by the idea of maintaining their inflated self-view, which, most of the time, based on an invalid ground; they tend to engage more in the downward comparison which allows them to derive the information they need despite how distorted the information is. That is, to avoid unfavorable self-views, and to secure the feeling of their self-worthiness, regardless of the validity of the worthiness, narcissists will not be hesitate to compare themselves with those less fortunate than them (Baumeister and Vohs 2001). Even when the situations do not accommodate the downward comparison, narcissists will go great length to create the situations that allow them to do so, or they may interpret, distort, or ignore unfavorable information as to maintain their positive self-view (Morf and Rhodewalt 2001; Brown and Bosson 2003). In sum, driven by self-enhancement motives,
narcissists can to do whatever it takes to maintain and enhance their unstable grandiose self-views without considering the validity of the comparison results.

For any individual to feel superior to others, that individual only needs to perceive either that he or she is better than others, or that others are worse than him or her. However, because most narcissists tend to overevaluate their attributes (e.g., physical appearance, intelligence) and performances (Campbell et al. 2004), to genuinely become better than others, or even become as great as a narcissist believes he or she is can be very difficult, or even impossible. Thus, narcissists, who are prone to engage in the tasks that provide immediate gratifications (Vazire & Funder 2006; Sedikides et al. 2007). Narcissists often rely heavily on the items that help enhance their attributes. Therefore, most narcissists are subject to perceive consumption or possession of materials as an opportunity to maintain and enhance their positive self-view (Sedikides et al. 2007). However, not all categories of product or material are attractive to narcissists.

Uniqueness and specialness are conceptually similar (Sedikides et al. 2002; Snyder and Fromkin 1980; Tian et al. 2001). According to uniqueness theory, the reason behind an individual’s motivation to be unique is to maintain a sense of specialness (Snyder and Fromkin 1980). In the realm of uniqueness-specialness, scarcity plays a crucial role as it provides individuals a venue to establish their specialness, or uniqueness as an important part of self-identity (Snyder 1992), and self-esteem (Campbell 1986). Therefore, when scarcity diminishes, individuals’ sense of uniqueness and specialness is jeopardized (Tian et al. 2001). Given that, it is reasonable to assume that consumers whose self-identities are defined as special or unique, and whose self-estees are bolstered by a sense of specialness or uniqueness, might feel
threatened and might try to prevent the diminishing of the scarcity of the source of their specialness. Recent study by Cheema and Kaikati (2010) confirms this assumption. The results suggest that consumers with high need for uniqueness are unwilling to engage in positive WOM because they are afraid that others will buy the product and decrease its exclusivity. Although the high need for uniqueness consumers are satisfied with a product, they refrain from promoting the product for fear of it becoming common. This suggests that the threat to specialness as part of self-identity and self-esteem must be intimidating that some individuals might be willing to put extra effort into eliminating the threat. The results from another study confirm this assumption. Argo et al. (2006) found that consumers are willing to lie during the WOM communication when they anticipate a self-threat from social comparison process. In addition to the threat to self-identity, prior research also suggests that self-bolstering and impression management can motivate individuals to engage in deceptive WOM communications (Sengupta et al. 2002). Specifically, in the symbolic consumption domain, individuals tend to lie about possessions of the products that create a positive self-image during the WOM communication.

However, possession of the items that promote positive self-image is just one among several ways that can enhance an individual’s sense of specialness. Intelligence and physical appearance, which are two important dimensions of self-identity and self-esteem (Flemming and Courtney 1984), can also have significant contributions to an individual’s sense of specialness (Campbell 2005). This is especially true for narcissist. Since superiority and vanity manifest themselves as two among seven factors in the NPI (Raskin and Hall 1979; Rasking and Terry 1988), undoubtedly, being intelligent and physically attractive are two important agentic
traits that narcissists extremely care about. Narcissists love to fantasize about fame, power, intelligence, physical attractiveness, and success because they believe these qualities contribute to their specialness and uniqueness (Campbell 2005). Since narcissists inflated self-view are based upon their perceived superiorities to others on these qualities (e.g., intelligence, physical appearance, authority), narcissists should perceive anything that enhances these qualities as extremely important sources of their specialness. Given the conceptually similarity of uniqueness and specialness mentioned earlier, individuals who have high need for uniqueness and individuals who have high in specialness (i.e., narcissists) should behave similarly when the scarcity of the source of uniqueness/specialness is threatened. Thus, based on the relation between scarcity and specialness/uniqueness, it is reasonable to posit that narcissists might be willing to do anything to safeguard those sources of their specialness. The stories about students in some cut-throat medical schools steal or tear pages out of reserved books as student sabotage are good examples that demonstrate this point (Maher 2010; Times New Network 2010). In fact, it is even possible that narcissists, compared to those who have high need for uniqueness, might be willing to go further to safeguard their sources of specialness because narcissists seem to have more reasons than their high need for uniqueness counterparts that drive them to do so. Narcissists’ additional reason is “a need to brag.”

Many studies suggest that individuals with high need for uniqueness appear to derive intrinsic satisfaction just from their own perceptions that they are unique or different from the mass (Simonson and Nowlis 2000; Snyder 1992). But bragging is not considered one of the signature characteristics of an individual with high need for uniqueness. Specifically, so far, there is no evidence regarding the explicit relationship between bragging and need for
uniqueness. On the other hand, bragging about themselves is one of the hallmarks of narcissists. That is, not only narcissists believe they are superior to others in several agentic dimensions, but also they love to brag about their superiorities in public. Bragging is more important than just a something that makes narcissists “narcissists,” but it is also an important tactic of their self-regulatory strategy (Buss and Chiodo 1991; Vangelisti et al. 1990).

Narcissists adopt bragging tactics to seek attention, direct conversation topics toward themselves, and show off in hope to publicly announce their superiority to others and elicit admirations (Campbell and Foster 2006). Because narcissists know very well how to make themselves look good and attractive (Sedikides et al. 2011), and they know how to put on an engaging, charming, and entertaining show in public (Paulhus 1998), when combined together with a skillful bragging, it is not difficult for narcissists to draw admirations that they want from others, especially at zero acquaintance (Campbell 2006). However, despite their adept self-bragging skill, narcissists still need something about themselves that they find special, which in turn allow them to build their bragging story upon. This might explain why narcissists are always on a lookout for latest, rare, savvy, or cool things (Sedikides et al. 2007). Narcissists need these sources of specialness as a basis of their bragging stories. These sources include items that attract admiration visually (e.g., luxury, rare, hi-end brand names); intellectually (e.g., how-to books, advanced knowledge subjects), and experientially (e.g., unique personal experience, such as having a meal with the president, or a trip to Everest).

Hypotheses Development

The main thesis of this dissertation centers on the idea that the level of narcissism might
influence an individual to engage in any behaviors though social interactions that limit others from gaining access to the individual’s perceived sources of specialness to sustain the scarcity of the accessibility to those sources, which in turn helps protect his or her perceived specialness. Specifically, during WOM commutation, narcissists might engage in any behaviors that will minimize others’ interest in gaining access to narcissists’ perceived sourced of specialness to eliminate anticipated threat to their self-esteem. Building upon this thesis, the following sections are dedicated to elaborate on how to define the boundary conditions of the present study.

The Moderating Effect of Narcissism on the Relationship Between the Nature of the Relationship Between WOM Sender and WOM Receive, and the Likelihood of Transferring of Information During WOM Communication

Based on the social exchange theory literature; Frenzen and Nakamoto (1993) posit that the social tie strength, or the nature of the relationship between WOM sender and the WOM receiver, can influence the likelihood of parties engaging in the social exchange interaction, i.e., WOM communication. Based on that notion, when the social tie between the WOM sender and the receiver is strong (e.g., friend, or co-worker) the likelihood of the WOM sender engaging in the WOM communication, and transmitting valued information should be higher compared to when the social tie between the two is weak (e.g., stranger). However, in all social exchange activities, there are costs associated with transmitting value information to others (Frezen and Nakamoto 1993; Gatignon and Robertson 1986). For narcissists, a potential cost associated with transmitting information about a unique product can be that the product is no longer unique as it become as commonplace. Or if the product that enhances narcissists’ specialness is acquired
by others, narcissists can lose their specialness. Such situation poses a huge threat to narcissist. Based on the similarity hypothesis (Festinger 1954), narcissists should perceive a bigger threat from someone similar to them (e.g., friend, co-worker). Particularly, the feeling of inferiority due to a comparison with someone similar and has a strong social tie creates a bigger self-threat than when the same feeling is due to a comparison with someone dissimilar or has weak social tie. This notion is confirmed by a recent study. Argo et al. (2006) found that consumers are willing to lie to their friends about the details of their purchasing experience that sheds a negative light on them to eliminate self-threat. But the consumers’ willingness to lie reduces when the target of comparison is strangers. Therefore, to secure their sources of specialness, narcissists might be less willing to share the information about the sources of their specialness, recommend the sources of their specialness, or even go further as to engage in negative WOM communication as a way to fade out the interests, particularly of those who are similar to them (e.g., working in the same place, performing similar jobs, graduating from the same school), to gain access to the target product. All of the above behaviors might be executed to minimize the opportunity costs associated with sharing the information about narcissists’ sources of their specialness. However, when the WOM receiver is someone who is dissimilar and to narcissists (e.g. strangers), their willingness execute those actions will decrease as the perceived cost and benefit associated with such the social exchange activities diminish.

In sum, the stronger social tie between the WOM sender and the WOM receiver should increase the likelihood of information sharing during the WOM communication. However, because the effect of the results from the social comparison process carries more impact on an individual when the target of comparison is someone similar to him or her, the individual’s level
of narcissistic personality trait can moderate such relationship and turn it in the opposite direction. Therefore, the following hypotheses are stated:

H1: When individuals with a high (vs. low) level of narcissistic personality trait engage in a WOM communication about a product that enhances their perceived specialness,

H1a: they will be less (vs. more) likely to recommend the product when the WOM receivers are co-workers (vs. strangers).

The Moderator of the Effect of Narcissism – Product’s Self-Enhancing Ability

Because narcissists especially care about the products that enhance themselves, the moderating effect of narcissism should be diminished when the product of interest has low self-enhancing ability. Therefore, the following hypotheses are stated:

H1b: when the product of interest is not perceived to enhance their specialness, the difference in terms of the likelihood of recommending the product between co-workers and strangers should be mitigated.

H1c: they will be more (vs. less) likely to engage in negative WOM communication about the product when the WOM receivers are co-workers (vs. strangers).

Moderator of the effect of narcissism - Product consumption type

Because narcissists’ ultimate goal is to elicit admiralions from other, they can only do so in public. The common tactics adopted by narcissists to elicit admiralions, such as displaying expensive, high-status material goods, dress up in brand name cloths, or drive expensive cars (Campbell and Foster 2006; Sedikides et al. 2007), clearly require that narcissists consume those product publicly. Thus, it is obvious to see that if narcissists were to adopt these tactics; these public products, as opposed to private products, are narcissists’ sources of specialness because these products offer opportunities for narcissists to brag. Given that, it is reasonable to assume that narcissists might be willing to do whatever it takes to safeguard the exclusivity of
the public products, as opposed to the private products.

In addition, previous research suggested that the influence of WOM communications varies across different mode of product consumption (Bearden and Etzel 1982; Brown and Reingen 1987). Particularly, the influence of WOM communication is greater for public than for private product. Because public product consumption, as opposed to private product consumption, is more likely to be subject to public scrutiny (Ratner and Kahn 2002), people tend to be more conscious and think harder when making decision about public product. Given all, because the consumption of public products (vs. private products) is more visible to the public, whom narcissists aim to impress using those products, narcissist should feel a bigger threat when the exclusivity of the public products (vs. private products) is threatened. And they might be less willing to share the information, or recommend the product to minimize the opportunity costs associated with sharing the information about narcissists’ sources of their specialness.

In short, because the opportunity of narcissists to draw attentions from others is much higher in public setting, as opposed to in private setting, narcissists will care more about public product as opposed to private product. Therefore, a product’s mode of consumption should moderate the effect of narcissism on the likelihood to recommend the product to other in the way that such effect remains when the product of interest is a public product, but diminishes when the product of interest is a private product. Therefore, the following hypotheses are stated:

H2: When individuals with a high (vs. low) level of narcissistic personality trait engage in a WOM communication,
H2a: when the product of interest is a public product, they will be less (more) likely to recommend the product when the WOM receivers are co-workers (vs. strangers).

H2b: when the product of interest is a private product, the difference in terms of the likelihood of recommending the product between co-workers and strangers should be mitigated.

The Content of WOM

Based on the literature regarding motivations to engage in WOM communication, not all WOM communication will conclude with the evaluation of the product or service of interest. On one hand, some WOM communications focus merely on discussing the product or service details rather than product or service review, which often entails negative, neutral, or positive evaluation of the experienced individual (Ditcher 1966). On the other hand, a lot of WOM communications include both product or service details and reviews of that product or service, including recommendation. Nonetheless, despite the inclusion of recommendation, WOM communication allows consumers to earn social capital (Dichter 1966; Feick and Price 1987). Thus, all types of WOM communication offer the opportunity for narcissists to brag. However, granted that the results from prior studies suggest that WOM communication that includes positive evaluation has greater influence on purchase intention (Arndt 1967; Cheema and Katkaiti 2010; Richins 1983), this might discourage narcissists to recommend the product that they perceive as the source of their specialness during the WOM communication. Specifically, because narcissists always seek an opportunity to brag about their specialness in public, engaging in a WOM communication regarding the product that enhances their specialness is just what narcissists want. However, since one of the main dimensions of narcissists based on NPI 40 is exploitative (Raskin and Hall 1979; Raskin and Terry 1988), which suggests that narcissists believe they can easily make other people believe in anything they want them to;
narcissists might not want to risk jeopardizing the exclusivity of their source of specialness. During WOM communication, narcissists can enjoy bragging about the details of the product that enhances their specialness to gain attentions and admirations from others. But narcissists will refrain from recommending the product in fear of decreasing the exclusivity of their source of specialness. Therefore, the following hypothesis is stated:

H3: The level of narcissist personality does not influence the willingness to provide product information regardless of both the nature of the relationship between WOM senders and receivers, and whether or not the product is perceived to enhance the specialness.

Moderator of Effect of Narcissism- Status of the of WOM Receiver

As previously discussed, besides displaying high-status items that enhance their specialness (Vohs and Campbell 2005), another typical tactic that narcissists adopt to make themselves look special is to associate themselves with high-status individuals (Campbell 1999). For narcissists, this is a tactic that offers a short-cut to effectively attract attentions, and elicit admirations and envies from others. In his study, Campbell (1999) found that narcissists are more attracted to those who are attractive, powerful, and successful than those who are warm and understanding. Since narcissists believe in their exploitative skill and they appear to be adept at using interpersonal relationship to enhance their specialness (Campbell 1999), narcissists should perceive more benefits from establishing a relationship with high-status individuals. Thus, given that, in the situation where narcissist might have to reveal their source of specialness in exchange for an opportunity to establish a relationship with high-status individuals, it is reasonable to assume that narcissists might agree to do so. In sum, narcissists might be willing to trade one source of their specialness with another one, which they believe can offer more benefits. Therefore, the status of the WOM receiver will moderate the effect of
narcissism. Therefore, the following hypotheses are stated:

H4: When individuals with a high (vs. low) level of narcissistic personality trait engage in a WOM communication about a product that enhances their perceived specialness,

H4a: they will be less (vs. more) likely to recommend the product when the WOM receivers are their co-workers (vs. strangers) whose status is equal compared to their status.

H4b: they will be more (vs. less) likely to recommend the product when the WOM receivers are co-worker (vs. strangers) whose status is higher compared to their status.

FIGURE 1
Research Model
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

In this chapter, the methodology used to test the proposed hypotheses is elaborated and outlined. Specifically, four studies were conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. The goal of study 1 is to test H1a, examining the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait on the relationship between WOM sender and receiver (co-worker vs. stranger) in terms of the likelihood of the WOM sender recommending the product to the WOM receiver. Specifically, Study 1 examined whether the increasing level of the individual’s narcissistic personality trait, measured by Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin and Terry 1988), can lower individual’s willingness to recommend the product that was deemed to enhance individual’s specialness to another who has a strong social tie. Study 1 also examine whether the effect of individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait can even influence an individual to engage in negative WOM about the same product (H1c). In Study 2, to increase the robustness of the results in Study 1, the similar procedures were conducted to examine the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait established in Study 1 in a different context (H1a and H1b). Also in Study 2, the scope of the Study was extended to find out whether the moderating effect established in Study 1 had any influence on the WOM sender’s willingness to discuss product detail with other people (H3). In Study 3, another boundary condition was examined by testing the moderating effect of product consumption types (H2a and H2b). In Study 4, another moderator “the status of the WOM receiver” was
tested to examine further boundary condition (H4a and H4b). The managerial implications and limitations were discussed at the end of the Study.

Study 1

Objective

The primary goal of Study 1 is to test H1a, establishing the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait on WOM communication. Specifically, the goal of this first Study is to determine whether individuals who are high in narcissistic personality trait, measured by Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin and Terry 1988), will be less likely to recommend a product that they perceived to enhance their specialness. It was expected that the level of narcissistic personality will moderate the likelihood of individuals giving a recommendation for a product that is perceived to enhance their specialness during the WOM communication in that when the WOM receiver are co-workers, the likelihood of giving a recommendation will be lower as opposed to when the WOM receiver are strangers. To this end, a product that was selected to test H1a was the Rolex watch. This product choice, i.e., Rolex watch was successfully used in a similar Study in which consumers are motivated by self-impression management to misrepresent the information about the product luxury product, i.e., the Rolex watch, (Sengupta et al. 2002). As one hallmark characteristic of narcissists is to show off and brag about their luxury, and expensive possessions, a luxury Rolex watch is considered very suitable for Study 1.

Design

An experiment with between-subjects design was conducted to test H1a. One dichotomous factor: the nature of the relationship between the participants and the fictitious
WOM receiver “Pat” (co-worker vs. stranger), and one continuous factor (narcissistic personality trait: NPI index) were included in the design. For Study 1, the dependent variable was the likelihood that the participants will recommend the product to Pat.

Participants

Sixty participants were originally recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk for Study 1. However, five participants were removed from the Study due to the failing of the attention test, therefore; fifty-five participants remained in the final analysis (53% Female). Please see TABLE 1 for the demographic profile of the participants in Study 1.

Procedures

At the beginning of the survey, all participants were told that the survey composed of several studies. Then all the participants were presented with a short video that described the scenario, including the nature of the relationship between the participants and Pat, and the product of interest, i.e., Rolex watch. The videos used in Study 1 were created specifically for the Study. Approximately half of the participants were randomly assigned to the scenario where Pat was manipulated as a “co-worker”, while the other half was assigned to the scenario where Pat was manipulated as a “stranger.” In addition to the details mentioned earlier, the participants were told that they recently bought a Rolex watch from a new online store “Mob-Drop” at a great price. And they were one among a very few existing customers to receive a special offer from Mob-Drop. The offer was that Mob-Drop agreed to refund half of what the participants paid for the Rolex watch if the participants could find someone who wanted to buy the same Rolex watch at a half price from Mob-Drop in the next three days. The reason why the offer was included in the scenario was to eliminate the possibility of the participants thinking
that the WOM receiver in the scenario, i.e., Pat, might not be able to afford the same Rolex watch due to its extremely expensive price even if a recommendation was given. In the scenario, Pat stated clearly about buying one if the price had been reduced by a half.

### TABLE 1
Demographic Profile of the Participants in Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<td>4 year college</td>
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The scenarios from the videos (See appendix A for the full script from the videos)

The “co-worker” scenario reads:

... Now, imagine this. Your last purchase from Mob-Drop was the latest model of a gorgeous Rolex watch. Ever since receiving it last week, everyone keeps complimenting your Rolex, especially your co-workers in a small-sized company with around 100 employees.

Right after you realized that you have just received this crazy limited offer from Mob-Drop through email, you looked up from your screen and found that “Pat,” one of your co-
workers, was looking admirably at your Rolex, and said “That’s a gorgeous watch. I want to get one as well, but it’s too expensive. I would have gotten one had it been half-priced.”

You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time.

The “stranger” scenario reads:

... Now, imagine this. Your last purchase from Mob-Drop was the latest model of a gorgeous Rolex watch. Ever since receiving it last week, everyone keeps complimenting your Rolex, especially your co-workers in a small-sized company with around 100 employees.

Now you are at an airport waiting for your flight for a business trip. While you’re waiting, you receive this crazy limited offer from Mob-Drop through email on your cell phone. Then you look up from your screen and see that one of the passengers who is also waiting for a flight is looking admirably at your Rolex. You have never met this person before. And after a moment, that person finally says “That’s a gorgeous watch. I want to get one as well, but it’s too expensive, I would have gotten it had it been half-priced.”

After a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is ‘Pat’, and that you and Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies.

After watching the video, the participants answered the questions about the video, including the dependent variable and the manipulation check questions. Then the participants answered the attention check questions, such as “Pat is ...?” (a school teacher, a co-worker, a passenger, ...); “Pat also ...?” (recently engaged, used to work in Hollywood, holds the same position, ...); and “The focal product in the scenario is ...?” (Luxury watch, coin, credit card, eyeglass, recliner, ...). Then the participants were informed that they just finished the first Study and were about to move on to a totally different Study. Then the participants answered the questions that measured their level of narcissistic personality (NPI; Raskin and Terry 1988), and potential covariates, including the short-form of consumer need for uniqueness (Tian et al. 2001); e.g., “As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone” (1 = “Strongly disagree,” 7 = “Strongly agree”), market maven (Feick and Price 1987); e.g., “I like helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of products” (1 =
“Strongly disagree,” 7 = “Strongly agree”), the short-form of social desirability scale (Crowne and Marlowe 1964); e.g., “There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others” (1 = “Strongly disagree,” 7 = “Strongly agree”). attitude toward the product, (Spears and Singh 2004); e.g., “Unappealing” – “Appealing,” “Unfavorable” – “Favorable,” and the likelihood of acquiring the product “If price is not an issue, how likely are you to get one of these products?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). And finally, the participants were asked about the demographics. At the end of the survey, the participants were debriefed about the scenarios.

Study 2

Objectives

The first goal of Study 2 is to confirm the results of Study 1, the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality (NPI index) on WOM communication. And Study 2 was also aimed at exploring the boundary condition of another potential moderator of the effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait (product’s self-enhancing ability: high vs. low; H1a and H1b). In addition to that Study 2 also tested whether it can influence people to engage in negative WOM communication to limit other people’s access to the product they perceived to enhance their specialness (H1c). To this end, it was expected that the level of narcissistic personality will moderate the likelihood of individuals engaging in negative WOM communication about a product that is perceived to enhance their specialness during the WOM in that when the WOM receiver are co-workers, the likelihood of engaging in negative
WOM communication will be higher as opposed to when the WOM receiver are strangers. In short, Study 2 tested H1a, H1b, and H1c.

Design

An experiment with between-subjects design was conducted to test H1a, H1b, and H1c in Study 2. Two dichotomous factors; product (Coin vs. Citi Simplicity Card) and nature of the relationship (co-worker vs. strangers), and one continuous factor (narcissistic personality trait: NPI index) were included in the design. To test H1a, and H1b, the same dependent variable used in Study 1, “the likelihood that the participants will recommend the product to Pat” was used. To test H1c, the likelihood of engaging in a negative WOM communication, the dependent variable used to test H1c was the “intention to emphasize on positive or negative information about the product.”

Participants

One hundred forty participants were originally recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk for Study 2. However, eight participants were removed from the Study due to the failing of the attention test, leaving one hundred thirty-two participants for the final analysis (46% Female). Please see table 2 for the demographic profile of the participants in Study 2.

Procedures

Similar to the procedure conducted in Study 1, at the beginning of the survey, all participants were told that the survey composed of several studies. Then all the participants were presented with a short video that describes the product of interest (Coin vs. Citi Simplicity Card). Approximately half of the participants were randomly assigned to Coin scenario, where the other half was assigned to Citi Simplicity Card scenario. The videos used in Study 2 were
different from those used in Study 1 in that the videos used in Study 2 were the videos that were created by both companies for a their commercial purposes. Therefore, these videos only described the product features, but not the scenarios for the Study. After the video, all participants were presented with more information about both products. Specifically, the participants were presented with the latest reviews of both products, which were available on the Internet (See appendix B1 for the additional information for Study 2). This additional information was used to test H3c later. Next, the participants were presented with a scenario. Among those participants who were randomly assigned to the Coin scenario, half of them were randomly assigned to “co-worker” scenario, and the other half were assigned to “stranger” scenario.

The “Coin” scenario reads:

“Imagine that you pre-ordered “Coin” a few months ago. So you are one among those people who will receive the first commercial batch of “Coin” by the end of summer 2014. You saw the latest reviews of the "Coin" from the beta testers on the Internet a few days ago.”

The “Citi Simplicity Card” reads:

“Imagine that Citi Simplicity Card is one among several credit cards you have. It is the latest credit card that you just got a few months ago. You saw the reviews of the Citi Simplicity Card several weeks after you received the card.”

Among those participants who were randomly assigned to the “Citi Simplicity Card” scenario, half of them were randomly assigned to “co-worker” scenario, and the other half were assigned to “stranger” scenario.

The “Coin-co-worker” scenario reads:

“Today while you’re working, one of your co-workers “Pat” stops by to chitchat with you as usual. Pat starts complaining about having to carry a thick wallet with too many credit cards inside. Pat just learned about “Coin” and asks for your opinion about it.
You and Pat work in a small-sized company with around 100 employees. You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time.”

The “Coin – stranger” scenario reads:

“Today, while you’re waiting for your flight for your business trip at an airport, one passenger who starts talking to you, complaining about having to carry a thick wallet with too many credit cards inside. This person just learned about “Coin” and asks for your opinion about it. You have never met this person before.

After a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is “Pat”, and that you can Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Profile of the Participants in Study 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>
The “Citi-co-worker” reads:

“Today while you are working, one of your co-workers “Pat” stops by to chitchat with you as usual. Pat is looking for a new credit card with attractive features and asks for your opinion about the latest credit card you got.

You and Pat work in a small-sized company with around 100 employees. You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time.”

The “Citi-stranger” reads:

“Today while you are waiting for your flight for a business trip at an airport, one of the passengers starts talking you about some interesting features of credit cards. You have never met this person before.

After a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is “Pat”, and that you and Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies. Finally, Pat asks for your opinion about the latest credit card you got.”

Then the participants answered the questions about the video, including the dependent variable and the manipulation check questions. Then the participants answered the attention check questions, and were informed that they just finished the first Study and were about to move on to a totally different Study. The rest of the procedures were identical to those used in Study 1.

Study 3

Objectives

The goal of Study 3 is twofold. The first one is to test H2a and H2b, exploring the boundary condition of the moderating effects of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait when the mode of consumption (private vs. public) was added into the analysis.

Specifically, Study 3 was conducted to examine the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality train (NPI index) on the likelihood to recommend a product to a co-worker (vs. a stranger) when the product was a public (vs. private) product.
The second goal of Study 3 is to test H3, regarding the level of individual’s narcissistic personality trait not affecting the consumers’ willingness to discuss product details with other people during the WOM communication.

The reasons why Study 3, as opposed to other studies, was chosen to test H3 were that, first, among all products chosen for this entire Study, including Rolex watch (Study 1), Coin vs. Citi Simplicity Cards (Study 2), Google GLASS vs. Novus zero gravity recliner (Study 3), and Vivid Optic’s Digital eyeglasses (Study 4); both Google GLASS and Novus zero gravity recliner are the two existing products that are well known among consumers. And second, given that both products have been in the market for a while, they allow more consumers to get exposed to the product reviews available through public domains, increasing the credibility of the reviews provided as a part of scenario in this Study. In short, the nature of these two products allowed participants to have enough information if they decided to discuss the product detail with other people based on the scenario. This is to minimize the possibility of the participants not being able to respond to the questions measuring the likelihood to discuss product detail with others due to the lack of information to discuss.

Design

An experiment with between-subjects design was conducted to test both H2 and H3. Two dichotomous factors; product (private product – Novus zero gravity recliner vs. public product – Google GLASS) and nature of the relationship (co-worker vs. strangers), and one continuous factor (narcissistic personality trait: NPI) were included in the design. For Study 3, the dependent variables were the likelihood that the participants will recommend the product to Pat (test H2a and H2b), and the likelihood of discussing product detail with Pat (test H3).
Participants

One hundred and forty participants were originally recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk for Study 3. However, sixteen participants were removed from the Study due to the failing of the attention test, therefore; one hundred and twenty-four participants remained for the final analysis (60% Female). Please see table 3 for the demographic information of the participants in Study 3.

| TABLE 3
| Demographic Profile of the Participants in Study 3 |

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<th>Gender</th>
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<th>Income</th>
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Procedures

Similar to the procedure used in the previous studies, at the beginning of the survey, all participants were told that the survey composed of several studies. Then all the participants were presented with a short video that describes the product of interest. Similar to the videos used in Study 2, the two videos used in Study 3 were those created by the companies for their commercial purposes, thus, contained only the information about the products, i.e., Google GLASS, and Novus zero gravity recliner, and not the scenarios for the Study. Approximately half of the participants was randomly assigned to “Google GLASS” scenario, where the other half was assigned to “Novus zero gravity recliner” scenario. Similar additional information about the reviews of the products containing both pros and cons of each product were presented to the respondents after the video (See appendix B2 for the addition information used in Study 3).

Among those participants who were randomly assigned to the “Google GLASS” scenario, approximately half of them were randomly assigned to “co-worker” scenario, and the other half were assigned to “stranger” scenario. The same pattern of randomization was also arranged among those participants who were randomly assigned to the “Novus” scenario.

The “Google GLASS-Co-worker” scenario reads:

“Imagine that you are one among a small group of people who bought the first commercial batch of Google GLASS last month. Ever since you received it, you have been wearing it everywhere, including your work place, a small-sized company with around 100 employees. Many of your co-workers compliment you on the Google GLASS, saying that it looks cool on you. And one of your co-workers who seems to be very interested in your Google GLASS is “Pat.”

You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time.

Today while you’re working, Pat stops by to chitchat with you as usual. Pat starts asking seriously about your opinion about your Google GLASS after having it for about a month.”
The “Google GLASS-Stranger” scenario reads:

“Imagine that you are one among a small group of people who bought the first commercial batch of Google GLASS last month. Ever since you received it, you have been wearing it everywhere, including your workplace, a small-sized company with around 100 employees. Many of your co-workers compliment you on the Google GLASS, saying that it looks cool on you. And all of them seem to be interested in your Google GLASS.

You are now waiting for your flight for a business trip at an airport. And while you are checking text messages through your Google GLASS, you notice that one of the passengers seems to be very interested in your Google GLASS. After a moment, that person finally says “That looks cool on your face. I have seen people wearing this for the past month.”

You have never met this person before. But after a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is “Pat”, and that you and Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies.

Finally, Pat seriously asks for your opinion about the Google GLASS after wearing it for about a month.”

The “Novus-Co-worker” scenario reads:

“Imagine that you bought Novus zero gravity recliner about a month ago. Today, one of your co-workers “Pat” comes to visit a friend who happens to live in your neighborhood. So Pat decides to stop by your place to chitchat with you as usual.

You and Pat work in a small-sized company with around 100 employees. You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time.

Pat seems to be very interested in your Novus, especially after trying it for a couple of times. Pat seriously asks for your opinion about the Novus after having it for about a month.”

The “Novus-Stranger” scenario reads:

“Imagine that one month ago, you bought a Novus Zero Gravity recliner from a store inside an airport terminal while waiting for the departure of your flight for a business trip. Today, you are at the same airport for another business trip. Since you arrive early, you decide to stop by the same store to discuss your experience with the salesperson who sold you the Novus. During the conversation, you notice another shopper seems to be very interested in the Novus, your conversation with the salesperson confirms the shopper’s interest. You have never met this person before.

After a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is “Pat”, and that you and Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies.

Finally, Pat seriously asks for your opinion about the Novus Zero Gravity recliner.”
The rest of the procedure in Study 3 was identical to that used in previous studies.

Study 4

Objective

The goal of Study is to test H4, exploring more boundary condition of the effect of individual’s narcissistic personality trait on the likelihood to recommend a product to others. In Study 4, the new potential moderator “status” of the WOM receiver was introduced in to the scenario.

Design

An experiment with between-subjects design was conducted to test H4. Same as the first two studies, two dichotomous factors; status (equal vs. Higher) and nature of the relationship (co-worker vs. strangers), and one continuous factor (narcissistic personality trait: NPI) were included in the design. Similar to all previous studies, the dependent variable was the likelihood that the participants will recommend the product to Pat. In Study 4, the product of interest is an existing product with a fictitious brand name. Specifically, the product used in Study 4 is the digital eyeglasses that help fix eye fatigue problems for those who spend long hours in front of computer screen. This product is an existing product that has been very popular among hardcore gamers who spend significant amount of time staring at computer or TV screens. The fictitious brand name was “Vivid Optic.”

Participants

One hundred and forty participants were originally recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk for Study 4. However, nine participants were removed from the Study due to the failing of the attention test, therefore; one hundred and thirty-one participants remained in
the final analysis (54% Female). Please see table 4 for the demographic information of the
participants in Study 4.

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**TABLE 4**
Demographic Profile of the Participants in Study 4

**Procedures**

Similar to the procedure used in the previous studies, at the beginning of the survey; all
participants were told that the survey composed of several studies. Then all the participants
were presented with a short video that was created specifically for this Study. The two videos
described the details of the product, i.e., the Digital eyeglasses, the nature of the relationship
between the participants and Pat, and Pat’s status. Approximately half of the participants were
randomly assigned to the scenario where Pat was manipulated as a “co-worker”, while the other half was assigned to the scenario where Pat was manipulated as a “stranger.” Among those participants who were randomly assigned to the “co-worker” scenario, approximately half of them were randomly assigned to the “equal status” scenario where Pat was manipulated as someone who held a similar position and started working in the company about the same time as the participants. And the other half was assigned to the “higher status” scenario where Pat was manipulated as someone who, before joining the current company, used to work in Hollywood, thus knew a lot of celebrities and always got invited to their private parties. The same assignment was done to those participants who were randomly assigned the “stranger” scenario.

The scenario describing the product, i.e., digital eyeglasses, reads:

“Imagine that your job requires you to stare at the computer screen for longer than 8 hours a day on average. And you’ve been doing this for years. Although you love your job a lot, staring at the screen continuously for that many hours surely strains your eyes. So far, you only depend on eye drops to help relieve the dryness and the eye fatigue.

However a few weeks ago, you just discovered “Vivid Optic’s Digital Eyeglasses.” These digital eyeglasses come with special amber tint lens that can block harsh blue light and glare from the computer screen, and provide a sharper and clearer vision, allowing the eyes to focus longer and more comfortably. You notice a huge difference right away when you tried them on, so you decided to get one of these. And ever since you started wearing this amber tint lens digital eyeglasses at work, you have never experienced any eye fatigue, dry eyes or blurry vision. Even your co-workers notice that you stop complaining about your vision problems completely. They just don’t know why. But everyone compliments you on the new glasses, saying that the amber lens make the glasses look very cool on your face.”

The “Co-worker-Equal status” reads:

“One day while you are working, one of your co-workers "Pat" stopped by to chitchat with you as usual. Pat started to complain about having experienced the eye fatigue problem due to the long hours of staring at the computer screen.

You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time.”
The “Co-worker-Higher status” reads:

“One day while you are working, one of your co-workers "Pat" stopped by to chitchat with you as usual. Pat started to complain about having experienced the eye fatigue problem due to the long hours of staring at the computer screen.
You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time. Before joining your company, Pat used to work for many agencies in Hollywood, therefore knows a lot of celebrities and always gets invited to their private parties.”

The “Stranger-Equal status” reads:

“One day you are waiting for your flight for a business trip at the airport, and checking your email on your laptop at the same time. One of the passengers who is also waiting for a flight starts to talk to you, complaining about having experienced the eye fatigue problem due to the long hours of staring at a computer screen. You have never met this person before.
After a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is ‘Pat’, and that you and Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies.”

The “Stranger-Higher status” reads:

“One day you are waiting for your flight for a business trip at the airport, and checking your email on your laptop at the same time. One of the passengers who is also waiting for a flight starts to talk to you, complaining about having experienced the eye fatigue problem due to the long hours of staring at a computer screen. You have never met this person before.
After a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is ‘Pat’, and that you and Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies. And before joining that company, Pat used to work for many agencies in Hollywood, therefore knows a lot of celebrities and always gets invited to their private parties.”

The rest of the procedure was identical to that used in all previous studies.
The primary goal of Study 1 is to test H1a, establishing the moderating effect of the individual's level of narcissistic personality trait on WOM communication. Specifically, the goal of this first Study is to determine whether individuals who are high in narcissistic personality trait, measured by the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (Raskin and Terry 1988), will be less likely to recommend a product that they perceived to enhance their specialness. It was expected that the level of narcissistic personality will moderate the likelihood of individuals giving a recommendation for a product that is perceived to enhance their specialness during the WOM communication in that when the WOM receiver are co-workers, the likelihood of giving a recommendation will be lower as opposed to when the WOM receiver are strangers.

Manipulation Check

The only manipulation was the nature of the relationship between the participants and Pat (co-worker vs. stranger). To check this manipulation, the participants were asked to answer a question: “Based on the scenario, how would you rate your familiarity with Pat?” (1 = Not familiar at all, 7 = Very familiar). One-way ANOVA was conducted to the check this manipulation. As expected, the manipulation check confirmed that the participants who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a co-worker rated their familiarity with Pat significantly higher than those who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a stranger ($M_{co-worker} = 5.89$ vs. $M_{stranger} = 3.64$, $F(1, 53) = 24.65$, $p < .001$). The manipulation was successful for Study 1.
Hypothesis Testing: H1a

To test H1a, examining the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality on the likelihood to recommend buying the product, regression analysis was performed as the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait is a continuous variable (Fitzsimons 2008). To this end, the main dependent variable was “the likelihood of recommending Pat to get the product.” To measure the dependent variable, the participants were asked to answer a question: “How likely are you to recommend Pat to get the product?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). This Study followed the same analytical procedure and the presentation of regression analysis, including the “pick-a-point” or “spotlight” analysis, suggested by Fitzsimons (2008). The following variables were included in the regression analysis: all 40 items of Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin and Terry 1988) were averaged to create a measure of NPI index (α = .95; mean centered for ease of interpretation), the nature of the relationship between the participants and Pat was represented by RELATION – dummy coded (0 = “stranger” vs. 1 = “co-worker”), two-way interaction terms. Several covariates were included in the analysis including consumer need for uniqueness (α = .93), market maven (α = .92), social desirability (α = .83), attitude toward the product (α = .91), and the likelihood of acquiring the product. However, because the additional information about the special offer from the online store was added to the scenario, three more potential covariates were taken into account. The first one was “the attitude toward the offer.” To measure this, the participants were asked “Please tell us what you think about the offer from the store?” The participants had to rate their thoughts about the store based on three seven-point semantic differential scales (“Unappealing” – “Appealing”; “Unfavorable” –
“Favorable”; and “Useless” – “Useful”). Second, “the likelihood of taking advantage of the offer.” To measure this, the participants answered a question: “How likely are you to take advantage of the offer you received from Mob-Drop?" (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). And third, “the possibility of qualifying for the offer”, to measure this, the participants answer a question: “Based on the scenario, how likely are you to be able to find someone to fulfill the condition of the offer within the next 3 days?" (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). However, only two covariates, attitude toward the product, and the likelihood of taking advantage of the offer, were significant at .05 level. The non-significant covariates were removed from the final analysis.

The regression model had an R Square of .60 ($F(5, 49) = 14.97, p < 0.001$). The two-way interaction between the nature of the relationship and NPI index was significant ($\beta = -.57, t = -2.04, p < 0.05$). Please see table 5 for the complete results from the regression analysis.

Because the two-way interaction was significant, on the basis of the recommendation of Aiken and West (1991) and Fitzsimons (2008), a spotlight analysis at one standard deviation

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</table>

a. Dependent Variable: RECOMMEND (*p < .05, ** p < .001).

Aiken and West (1991) and Fitzsimons (2008), a spotlight analysis at one standard deviation...
below and above the mean of the NPI index was conducted to examine the nature of the interaction.

The results from the spotlight analysis at one standard deviation below and above the mean of the NPI index (figure 2) suggested the difference between whether Pat was a co-worker and a stranger seemed more pronounced in those participants who scored high on NPI index compared to those who scored low on NPI index in terms of their likelihood to recommend the product to Pat. Although the visual representation of the spotlight analysis seemed to support H1a, the statistics at one standard deviation below and above the mean of the NPI index was only marginally significant in those who scored high on NPI index ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 5.61 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{stranger}} = 6.25$, $\beta = -.64$, $t = -1.81$, $p = .07$). And the non-significant difference (in terms of the likelihood to recommend the product to Pat) was also observed in those participants who scored low on NPI index ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 6.34 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{stranger}} = 5.97$, $\beta = .37$, $t = 1.08$, NS). The results suggested that the difference was not obvious at the level of one standard deviation below and above the mean of NPI index. However, because the two-way interaction effect in
the regression model presented above was significant, a further analysis was conducted to find out the level at which the NPI index would cause a significant difference in terms of the likelihood to recommend the product. To that end, another spotlight analysis at one and a half standard deviation below and above the mean of the NPI index was conducted.

Figure 3
Spotlight Analysis – Rolex at ±1.5 SD of the NPI Index

Based on the figure 3, the differences at one and a half standard deviation below and above the mean of the NPI index were more obvious in both low-NPI and high-NPI groups. As expected, the statistics confirmed the idea. While the difference between Pat was a co-worker or a stranger remained not significant in those participants who scored low on the NPI index ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 6.50$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 5.88$, $\beta = .62$, $t = 1.42$, NS), such difference was marginally significant in those participants who scored high on the NPI index ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 5.43$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 6.33$, $\beta = -.89$, $t = -1.98$, $p = .05$). Based on the results from the regression analysis and the spotlight analysis at one and a half standard deviation below and above the mean of the NPI index, H1a was supported. As the NPI index increased, the likelihood of recommending the
product to Pat dropped significantly when Pat was a co-worker as opposed to when Pat was a stranger.

Study 2

The goal of Study 2 is to confirm the results of Study 1, the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality (NPI index) on WOM communication. And Study 2 was also aimed at exploring the boundary condition of the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait by testing its effect in a different context (different product category), and testing whether it can influence people to engage in negative WOM communication to limit other people’s access to the product they perceived to enhance their specialness. To this end, it was expected that the level of narcissistic personality will moderate the likelihood of individuals engaging in negative WOM communication about a product that is perceived to enhance their specialness during the WOM in that when the WOM receiver are co-workers, the likelihood of engaging in negative WOM communication will be higher as opposed to when the WOM receiver are strangers. Specifically, Study 2 tested H1a, H1b, and H1c.

Manipulation Check

The first manipulation was the nature of the relationship between the participants and “Pat” (co-worker vs. stranger). To check this manipulation, the participants were asked to answer a question: “Based on the scenario, how would you rate your familiarity with Pat?” (1 = “Not familiar at all,” 7 = “Very familiar”). One-way ANOVA was conducted to check the manipulation. As expected, the manipulation check confirmed that the participants who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a co-worker rated their familiarity with Pat significantly higher than those who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a stranger.
(M_{co-worker} = 5.51 vs. M_{stranger} = 2.72, F(1, 130) = 160.77, p < .001). The second manipulation was the product (coin vs. Citi Simplicity card). To check this manipulation, the participants were asked to answer three questions: 1. “How likely it is that other people can notice when you use coin (vs. Citi Simplicity card)?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”); 2. “How likely are you to standout from other people if you use coin (vs. Citi Simplicity card)?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”); and 3. “How likely is it that people will be impressed if you use coin (vs. Citi Simplicity card)?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). The score of these three items were averaged to form a measure of self-enhancing ability index (α = .901). One-way ANOVA was conducted to check this second manipulation. As expected, the results from one-way ANOVA confirmed that the participants rated the self-enhancing ability index of coin significantly higher than that of Citi Simplicity card (M_{coin} = 5.12 vs. M_{citi} = 3.06, F(1, 130) = 68.90, p < .001). Both manipulations were successful for Study 2.

Hypotheses Testing: H1a, and H1b

To test H1a, and H1b, examining the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality on the likelihood to recommend the product to other, regression analysis was performed as the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait is a continuous variable. To this end, the main dependent variable was “the likelihood of recommending Pat to get the product.” To measure the dependent variable, the participants were asked to answer a question: “How likely are to you recommend Pat to get coin (vs. Citi Simplicity card)?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). This Study followed the same analytical procedure and the presentation of regression analysis, including the “pick-a-point” or “spotlight” analysis, suggested by Fitzsimons (2008). The following variables were included in analysis: NPI index –
all 40 items of NPI were averaged to create a measure of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait (mean centered for ease of interpretation), Relation – dummy coded (0 = “stranger” vs. 1 = “co-worker”), Product – dummy coded (0 = “Citi” – low self-enhancing ability product vs. 1 = “coin” – high self-enhancing ability product), three two-way interaction terms, and one three-way interaction term. The same set of covariates included in Study 1 was included in the analysis of Study 2. However, in this analysis, only two covariates, attitude toward the product, and the likelihood of acquiring the product, were significant. The non-significant covariates were removed from the final analysis.

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Dependent Variable: RECOMMEND  (*p < .05, ** p < .001)

The regression model had an $R^2$ of .55 ($F(9, 122) = 16.54, p < 0.001$). The three-way interaction among nature of the relationship, product, and NPI index ($\beta = -.90, t = -2.26, p <$
0.05), and two-way interaction between nature of the relationship and product ($\beta = -4.32$, $t = -2.45$, $p < 0.05$) emerged. Please see table 6 below for the complete results from the regression analysis.

Because the three-way interaction among the nature of the relationship, product, and NPI index was significant, on the basis of the recommendation of Aiken and West (1991) and Fitzsimons (2008), spotlight analysis were conducted at one standard deviation below, and above, the mean of the NPI index to examine the pattern of the interaction.

**FIGURE 4**
Spotlight Analysis – Citi Simplicity Card

In the Citi Simplicity card scenario (figure 4), recognizing that this product was low on self-enhancing ability index, as expected, there was no difference in terms of the likelihood to give a product recommendation to Pat whether when Pat was a co-worker or a stranger in both the participants who scored high on the NPI index ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 4.66$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 4.89$, $\beta = .024$, $t = .64$, NS), and those who scored low on the NPI index ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 5.08$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 4.50$, $\beta = .58$, $t = 1.33$, NS). The results in this scenario provided a support for H1b, which was hypothesized that the moderating effect of individual’s narcissistic personality would be
mitigated when the product of interest was not perceived to enhance the individual’s specialness (low on self-enhancing ability index).

**FIGURE 5**
Spotlight Analysis – Coin

![Graph showing Spotlight Analysis – Coin](image)

In the coin scenario (figure 5), those participants who scored high, compared to those who scored low, on the NPI index were more likely to give a product recommendation to Pat when Pat was a stranger. However, the pattern of the likelihood to recommend the product to Pat when Pat was a co-worker suggested the opposite results compared to what was expected. Among those participants who scored low on NPI index, there was a significant difference in terms of the likelihood to recommend coin to Pat between when Pat was a co-worker and when Pat was a stranger ($M_{co-worker} = 3.75$ vs. $M_{stranger} = 4.79$, $\beta = -1.04$, $t = -2.89$, $p < 0.05$). Among those participants who scored high on NPI index, there was no difference in terms of the likelihood to recommend coin to Pat whether when Pat was a co-worker or a stranger ($M_{co-worker} = 5.22$ vs. $M_{stranger} = 5.51$, $\beta = .28$, $t = .66$, NS). Unexpectedly, in coin scenario, the same patterns of behavior emerged whether Pat was a co-worker or a stranger. This is an exact opposite of the H1a, which hypothesized that the participants who scored high, compared to
those who scored low, on NPI index would be less likely to give a product recommendation to Pat when Pat was a co-worker. As a result, H1a was not supported in this Study.

Hypothesis Testing: H1c

Next, to test H1c, the likelihood of engaging in a negative WOM communication, a slightly different procedure was conducted. To this end, the dependent variable used to test H1c was the “intention to emphasize on positive or negative information about the product.” To measure the dependent variable, the participants were asked the question: “If price is not an issue for Pat, when you give the overall evaluation of the product to Pat, would you emphasize more on the cons, or more on the pros of the product?” (1 = “Cons,” 7 = “Pros”). Based on the scale 1 to 7, point 4 on the scale represented the “balanced” condition, where the respondent chose to emphasize both cons and pros of the product equally. Points 1 through 3 on the scale represented more emphasis on the cons of the product; the smaller the number on the scale, the more emphasis on the cons of the product. Points 5 through 7 on the scale represented more emphasis on the pros of the product; the larger the number on the scale, the more emphasis on the pros of the product.

For the analysis, same as in the previous studies, regression analysis was also performed to test H1c as the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait is a continuous variable. However, this time, only those participants who were randomly assigned to the “coin” condition were included in this particular analysis. The reason why only those participants in coin scenario were selected to test H1c is that among all products chosen for this entire Study, including Rolex watch (Study 1), coin vs. Citi Simplicity cards (Study 2), Google GLASS vs. Novus zero gravity recliner (Study 3), and Vivid Optic’s Digital eyeglasses (Study 4); “coin” is the only
existing product (not a hypothetical one) that has not been available to the public, yet (the first commercial version of coin is scheduled to be shipped by the end of summer 2014). This is important as the participants were to be asked to decide whether to emphasize more on the positive information (pros) or more on the negative information (cons) of coin when the participants were asked to give their opinions about coin by Pat.

In the scenario, the participants were presented with the latest reviews by the beta testers. The design rationale follows. First, except for a very small group of beta testers, most consumers had not owned coin themselves. Therefore, the participants were informed in the scenario that they pre-ordered coin a long time ago before they learned about the reviews from the beta testers, and had yet to receive it. This allowed them to decide freely whether to emphasize on the pros or the cons when they were required to give some opinions about it without creating any conflict in their behaviors. This is to avoid the situation in which the participants could feel awkward if they decided to talk down coin badly (emphasize cons), yet still used it regularly. Because no one actually owns coin. Yet, everyone can freely decide to praise or talk down coin without any restrain. And that is why coin is the most suitable product to test H1c. And because the manipulation check earlier confirmed that coin was rated significantly higher than Citi Simplicity card on the self-enhancing ability index, there was no need to include Citi Simplicity card in this analysis.

After removing all participants who were assigned to Citi Simplicity card scenario, sixty-eight participants (52% female) were left for the analysis. All the procedures used to test H1a, and H1b were repeated to test H1c, except for the dependent variable. To measure the dependent variable for this particular analysis, the coin participants were asked the question:
“If price is not an issue for Pat, when you give the overall evaluation of coin to Pat, would you emphasize more on the cons, or more on the pros of coin?” (1 = “Cons,” 7 = “Pros”).

### TABLE 7
Regression Results (Study 2-2)

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*Dependent Variable: EMPHASIZE (*p < .05, **p < .001)*

The regression model had an $R^2$ of 0.141 ($F(3, 64) = 3.51, p < 0.05$). The two-way interaction between the nature of the relationship and NPI index was also significant, and the beta coefficient was positive ($\beta = 1.07, t = 2.40, p < .05$). Because the two-way interaction was significant, a spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the NPI index was conducted to examine the pattern of the interaction.

The dependent variable in this spotlight analysis was the “intention to emphasize on positive or negative information of the product”, where the average scores of 4 on the scale represented the “balanced” emphasis. The average scores below 4 represented more emphasis on “cons” of the product. The average scores above 4 represented more emphasis on “pros” of the product. Based on the results from the spotlight analysis (figure 6), those participants who scored low on NPI emphasized significantly more on cons when Pat was a co-worker as opposed to when Pat was stranger ($M_{co-worker} = 3.70$ vs. $M_{stranger} = 5.03$, $\beta = -1.33$, $t = -2.33$, $p <$
0.05). In contrast, those participants who scored high on NPI index rated slightly more toward pros, and the difference between whether Pat was a co-worker or a stranger was not significant 

\(M_{\text{co-worker}} = 5.03 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{stranger}} = 5.72, \beta = .69, t = 1.16, \text{ NS}.)

**FIGURE 6**
Spotlight Analysis – Intention to Emphasize More on Positive or Negative Information of the Product

Based on the results above, the participants who scored low on the NPI had higher tendency to engage in a negative WOM communication about the product with high self-enhancing ability index when the WOM receivers were co-workers than when the WOM receivers were strangers. Unfortunately, because the slope of the co-worker line was positive, suggesting the opposite outcome compared to what was hypothesized in H1c, which expected a negative slope for co-worker plot. The results from this spotlight analysis suggested that those participants who scored high on the NPI index were more likely to engage in positive WOM when talking to their co-workers even when the product of interest was high in self-enhancing ability index. Thus, H1c was not supported. In sum, the results from Study 2 supported H1b, but not H1a, and H1c.
The goal of Study 3 is twofold. The first one is to test $H_{2a}$ and $H_{2b}$, exploring the boundary condition of the moderating effects of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait when the mode of consumption (private vs. public) was added into the analysis. Specifically, Study 3 was conducted to examine the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait (NPI index) on the likelihood to recommend a product to a co-worker (vs. a stranger) when the product was a public (vs. private) product.

The second goal of Study 3 is to test $H_3$, regarding the level of individual’s narcissistic personality trait not affecting the consumers’ willingness to discuss product details with other people during the WOM communication.

**Manipulation Check**

Similar to all previous studies, the first manipulation was the nature of the relationship between the participants and “Pat” (co-worker vs. stranger). One-way ANOVA was conducted to check the manipulation. As expected, the manipulation check confirmed that the participants who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a co-worker rated their familiarity with Pat significantly higher than those who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a stranger ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 5.46$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 2.97$, $F(1, 122) = 105.51$, $p < .001$). The second manipulation was the product (Google GLASS – public product vs. Novus zero gravity recliner – private product). To check this manipulation, the participants were asked to answer two questions (Cheema and Kaikati 2010): 1. “How likely is it that other people can see when you wear a Google GLASS (vs. use a Novus)?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”), and 2. “How likely are you to wear a Google GLASS (vs. use a Novus) in other places besides your home?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). The scores of these two items were
averaged to form a measure of public-private index. One-way ANOVA was conducted to check this second manipulation. As expected, the results from one-way ANOVA confirmed that the participants rated the public-private index of Google GLASS significantly higher than that of Novus zero gravity recliner ($M_{\text{glass}} = 5.42$ vs. $M_{\text{novus}} = 3.35$, $F(1, 122) = 81.20, p < .001$). Both manipulations were successful for Study 3.

Hypotheses Testing: H2a, and H2b

For Study 3, two main dependent variables were used in 2 different analyses. The first dependent variable was “the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat.” The second dependent variable was “the likelihood to discuss product detail with Pat.”

First, to test H2a and H2b, regression analysis was performed as the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait is a continuous variable. The same procedures used in Study 2 were conducted to test H2a and H2b. The following variables were included in analysis: NPI index – all 40 items of NPI were averaged to create a measure of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait (mean centered for ease of interpretation), Relation – dummy coded (0 = “stranger” vs. 1 = “co-worker”), Product – dummy coded (0 = “Novus” – private product vs. 1 = “Google GLASS” – public product), three two-way interaction terms, and one three-way interaction term. The same dependent variable used in Study 2, “the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat.” The same set of covariates as used in previous studies was included in the analysis of Study 3. In addition to those co-variates used in Study 2, two more potential covariates were added to the original set to test H2a and H2b. Those two were “How likely are you to share information about the pros of the product?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”), and “How likely are you to share information about the cons of the
product?” (1 = “Not likely at all,” 7 = “Extremely likely”). The reason why these two were included in this Study was due to the way these two questions were presented to the participants in the online survey. These two questions were presented one page before the question measuring the dependent variable (the likelihood to recommend the product to Pat). All participants were required to answer these two questions, and then moved on to the following page where the questions measuring the dependent variable was presented. The participants were not allowed to move backward in the online survey to change any previous responses, therefore, how the participants answered these two questions might influence the way they answer the question measuring the dependent variable. For example, it could create some psychological inconsistency in some participants if they ended up recommending the product that they shared a lot of bad things about it earlier, or vice versa. Therefore, the extent to which the participants decided to share the information about the pros and the cons of the products prior to being asked to recommend it might influence the extent to which the participants choose to recommend that product to others. And as expected, one of these two questions, i.e., the likelihood to share information about the pros (PROS), became a significant covariate, thus remained in the final analysis.

The regression model had an $R^2$ of .30 ($F(8, 115) = 7.08, p < 0.001$). The three-way interaction among the nature of the relationship, product type, and NPI index was significant ($\beta = -1.42, t = -2.57, p < .05$). Please see table 8 below for the complete results from the regression analysis.

TABLE 8
Regression Results (Study 3-1)
Because the three-way interaction among the nature of the relationship, product type, and NPI index was significant, a spotlight analysis at one standard deviation above and below the mean of NPI index was conducted to examine the nature of the interaction.

In Novus (private product) scenario (figure 7), the nature of the relationship between Pat and the participants who scored high on NPI index, whether Pat was their co-worker or a stranger made no difference in terms of their likelihood to recommend Pat to get the product ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 5.29$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 4.93$, $\beta = .36$, $t = .84$, NS). The similar results were observed for participants who scored low on NPI index. There was no significant difference in terms of the likelihood to recommend Pat to get the product whether Pat was a co-worker or a stranger ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 4.89$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 5.41$, $\beta = -.52$, $t = -1.06$, NS). The results from this condition supported $H_{2b}$, which was hypothesized that the moderating effect of individual’s level of narcissistic personality would be mitigated when the product of interest was a private product.
In the Google GLASS (public product) scenario (figure 8), no significant difference in terms of the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat regardless of the nature of the relationship with Pat was observed in those participants who scored low on NPI index ($M_{co-worker} = 5.37$ vs. $M_{stranger} = 4.94$, $\beta = .43$, $t = 1.00$, NS). However, among those participants who scored high on the NPI index, the nature of the relationship between them and Pat, whether Pat was
their co-worker or a stranger, made a significant difference in terms of their likelihood to recommend Pat to get the product ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 4.52$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 5.60$, $\beta = -1.08$, $t = -2.29$, $p < 0.05$). The participant who scored high on NPI index were less likely to recommend Google GLASS to Pat when Pat was a co-worker compared to when Pat was a stranger. Based on the results from this scenario, H2a was supported. When the product of interest was a public product, the participants who scored high on the NPI index were less likely to recommend Pat to get the product when Pat was a co-worker than when Pat was a stranger.

Hypothesis Testing: H3

Next, to test H3, examining the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality on the likelihood to discuss about product detail with other, regression analysis was performed as the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait is a continuous variable. The same procedures used when testing H2 were conducted to test H3. The following variables were included in analysis: NPI index – all 40 items of NPI were averaged to create a measure of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait (mean-centered for ease of interpretation), Relation – dummy coded (0 = “stranger” vs. 1 = “co-worker”), Product – dummy coded (0 = “Novus” – private product vs. 1 = “Google GLASS” – public product), three two-way interaction terms, and one three-way interaction term. To measure the dependent variable, the participants were asked three questions (Harrison-Walker 2001): first, “How likely are you to talk to Pat in detail about Google GLASS (vs. Novus)” (1 = Not likely at all, 7 = Extremely likely); second, “How likely are you to share the information about the pros of the Google GLASS (vs. Novus) with Pat?” (1 = Not likely at all, 7 = Extremely likely); and third, “How likely are you to share the information about the cons of the Google GLASS (vs. Novus) with Pat?” (1 = Not likely
at all, 7 = Extremely likely). The scores from the three questions were averaged to form a measurement of product detail discussion index (α = .69). The same set of covariates as used in previous studies was included in the analysis. Only two covariates, attitude toward the product, and the likelihood of acquiring the product, were significant in Study 2. The non-significant covariates were removed from the final analysis.

The regression model had an R Square of .28 (F(9, 114) = 4.90, p < 0.001). The three-way interaction among nature of the relationship, product, and NPI index was not significant (β = .48, t = -.85, NS). The two-way interaction between nature of the relationship and product was not significant (β = -.28, t = -.62, NS). Two-way interaction between nature of the relationship and NPI index was not significant (β = -.44, t = -1.08, NS). Two-way interaction between product and NPI index was not significant (β = -.12, t = -.28, p < .05). Please see TABLE 9 below for the complete results from the regression analysis.

Based on the results presented above, because the three-way interaction among the nature of the relationship, product, and NPI index was not significant, it provided a support to H3. Specifically, the individual’s level of narcissistic personality did not discourage the participants from discussing about the product’s detail with Pat in all circumstances, regardless of whether Pat was a co-worker or a stranger, and regardless of whether the product was a private or a public product. Besides the three-way interaction term mentioned earlier, only the simple effect of product type was significant (β = .67, t = 2.18, p < .05). This significant positive simple effect of product type suggested that in general, all participants were more likely to discuss with others about product detail when the product of interest was a public product rather than private product (Product – dummy coded as 0 = private vs. 1 = public).
This made a logical sense in that people might feel less comfortable to discuss about the details of a private product as doing might unintentionally offend or hurt other people, or discussing about private product might be embarrassing in many circumstances.

The results from the regression analysis provided a support to H3, confirming that the individual's level of narcissistic personality does not influence the willingness to discuss product detail with other people regardless of the nature of the relationship between the participants and the WOM receivers, and regardless of whether the product of interest was a private or a public product.

**Study 4**
The goal of Study 4 is to test $H_4$, exploring more boundary condition of the moderating effect of individual’s narcissistic personality trait on the likelihood to recommend a product to others. In Study 3, the new factor “status” of the WOM receiver was introduced into the scenario.

**Manipulation Check**

Similar to all previous studies, the first manipulation was the nature of the relationship between the participants and Pat (co-worker vs. stranger). One-way ANOVA was conducted to check the manipulation. As expected, the manipulation check confirmed that the participants who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a co-worker rated their familiarity with Pat significantly higher than those who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was a stranger ($M_{\text{co-worker}} = 5.54$ vs. $M_{\text{stranger}} = 2.45$, $F(1, 129) = 104.57$, $p < .001$). The second manipulation was Pat’s status (equal status vs. higher status). To check this manipulation, the participants were asked to answer a question: 1. “Based on the scenario, how would you rate your status compared to Pat’s?” (1 = Much lower than Pat’s, 7 = Much higher than Pat’s). One-way ANOVA was conducted to check this second manipulation. As expected, the results from one-way ANOVA confirmed that the participants who were assigned to the scenario where Pat was manipulated as someone who used to work in Hollywood and knew a lot of celebrities rated their status significantly lower than those participants who were assigned to the scenario where Pat had equal status compared to them ($M_{\text{equal}} = 4.10$ vs. $M_{\text{higher}} = 3.59$, $F(1, 130) = 13.99$, $p < .001$). Both manipulations were successful for Study 4.

**Hypothesis Testing: $H_{4a}$ and $H_{4b}$**
The same procedures used in previous studies were conducted to test H4a and H4b. The following variables were included in analysis: NPI index – all 40 items of NPI were averaged to create a measure of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait (mean centered for ease of interpretation), Relation – dummy coded (0 = “stranger” vs. 1 = “co-worker”), Pat’s status – dummy coded (0 = “Equal status” vs. 1 = “Higher status”), three two-way interaction terms, and one three-way interaction term. The same dependent variable used in Study 1 and Study 2, “the likelihood of recommending Pat to get the product.” The same set of covariates as used in previous studies was included in the analysis of the previous studies. None of the covariates were significant except for the likelihood of acquiring the product; therefore, only one covariate remained in the final analysis.

The regression model had an R Square of .36 ($F(8, 122) = 8.54, p < 0.001$). The three-way interaction among nature of the relationship, status, and NPI index was significant ($β = .94, t = 2.54, p < .05$). Two-way interaction between nature of the relationship and NPI index was marginally significant at $p = .51$ ($β = -.54, t = -1.97, p = .51$). Two-way interaction between nature of the relationship and status was significant ($β = -3.51, t = -2.25, p < .05$). Please see table 10 below for the complete results from the regression analysis.

Because the three-way interaction among nature of the relationship, status, and NPI index was significant, a spotlight analysis was conducted at one standard deviation above and below the mean of NPI index to examine the nature of the interaction. Based on the results from the spotlight analysis (figure 11), in equal status scenario, those participants who scored high on NPI index were less likely to recommend the product to Pat when Pat was a co-worker as opposed to a stranger. The difference was significant ($M_{co-worker} = 5.82$ vs. $M_{stranger} = 6.43, β = \ldots$)
- .61, $t = -1.90, p = .05$). Such difference was not significant in those who scored low on NPI index ($M_{co-worker} = 6.67$ vs. $M_{stranger} = 6.38, \theta = .29, t = .92, NS$).

### TABLE 10
Regression Results (Study 4)

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*a. Dependent Variable: RECOMMEND (*p < .05, **p < .001)*

**FIGURE 9**
Spotlight Analysis – Pat’s Status is Equal to Participants’
In higher status scenario, where Pat’s status was manipulated to be higher than that of the participants, there was no difference in terms of the likelihood to recommend the product to Pat whether Pat was a co-worker of a stranger in those participants who scored low on NPI index \((M_{\text{co-worker}} = 6.19 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{stranger}} = 6.32, \beta = -.12, t = -.42, \text{ NS})\). In those participants who scored high on NPI index, the difference between whether Pat was a co-worker or a stranger seemed more pronounced. However, based on the results from the spotlight analysis showed that the difference at one standard deviation above the mean of the NPI index was marginally significant at \(p = .69\) \((M_{\text{co-worker}} = 6.07 \text{ vs. } M_{\text{stranger}} = 6.63, \beta = .56, t = 1.83, p = .69)\).

The significant three-way interaction and the results from the spotlight analysis suggested that status of the WOM receiver influenced the likelihood of those participants who scored high in NPI index in that when the WOM receiver who was an equal-status co-worker, the likelihood of recommending the product was lower than when the WOM receiver was an equal status stranger. And when the WOM receiver was a higher-status co-worker, compared
to a higher-status stranger, the results turned to the opposite direction. Although some results were marginally significant, these results arguably supported both H4a, and H4b.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

General Discussion

The objective of this Study is two-fold. The first objective is to establish the moderating effect of narcissism on WOM communication. Specifically, the current Study is an attempt to answer the question whether the higher level of average Joe's narcissism will influence an individual’s decision to share information about the product, recommend the product, or engage in negative WOM about a product in order to fade out others’ interests to gain access to that product. The second objective is to explore the boundary conditions of the aforementioned effects.

The results from Study 1, which was aimed at testing the moderating effect of the individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait on the relationship between the nature of relationship between WOM sender (participants) and the WOM receiver (Pat) and the likelihood to recommend the product that is perceived to enhance the individual’s specialness supported H1a. Based on the results from Study 1, the moderating effect of narcissism on the relationship between the nature of the relationship between WOM sender and the WOM receiver, and the likelihood to recommend a high self-enhancing ability product to others was established. As those individuals whose level of narcissistic personality trait is high feel more threat to their specialness from those who are close to them, they tend to respond by minimizing the opportunity cost of sharing the information about their perceived special product with others.
Study 2 was not able to confirm the same results produced in Study 1 when the third factor, the product’s self-enhancing ability (high vs. low) was included into the analysis. In Study 2, which was aimed at testing the moderating effect of product’s self-enhancement ability on the effect of narcissism, did not support the proposed hypotheses (H1a, and H1b). Based on H1a, and H1b, when the product of interest was coin, which was considered a high self-enhancing ability product, the participants who scored high on the NPI index turned out to recommended coin to Pat more when Pat was a co-worker than when Pat was a stranger. This was the exact opposite of what was hypothesized.

The results of part one of Study 2, where the dependent variable was the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat when Pat was co-worker, and that of the second part, where the dependent variable was the intention to emphasize more on positive or negative information of the product when Pat was a co-worker, were consistent with each other. Specifically, the participants who score high on the NPI index were more likely to recommend coin to Pat (co-worker), and they were less likely to emphasize more on the cons of coin when giving the overall evaluation of coin to Pat (co-worker). The possible explanation to these unexpected results could come from the way the particular scenario in this Study was set up. Because in the scenario, Pat, regardless of the nature of the relationship, had already learned about coin, and seemed to have a plan to get one as a solution to the thick wallet problem.

This scenario might make the participants feel as if Pat came to them just for a second opinion. And in this particular scenario, because no one actually had owned coin yet, their opinions about coin were just speculations based on the reviews available on the Internet. Therefore, their opinions might not carry a lot of weight due to the lack of the direct experience
with the product. Because narcissists, by nature, are very calculative people, they might not want to invest their effort in something that might not yield a reasonable rate of return. The results from Study 2 are likely the reflection from that aspect of those who are high in narcissistic personality trait. Therefore, when the return on investment of the action influenced by narcissism was not favorable for those who scored high on the NPI index, the conventional way based on the social exchange theory took over the decision making. That was transmitting the valued information to someone with a strong social tie as opposed to someone with the weak tie.

Additionally, another possible explanation might be attributed to the focal product itself (coin). Although the participants rated coin significantly higher than Citi Simplicity card in terms of its self-enhancing ability, but compared to other products in other studies, i.e., Rolex watch, Google GLASS, Digital eyeglasses, coin was arguably the least conspicuous item on the list. No matter how cool people might perceive coin to be, in reality, it was just another credit card-substitute, which would probably stay in the wallet most of the time. The chances that other people could see someone using coin were quite low, compared to other products in other studies, which were much easier to notice when used (i.e., a Rolex watch, Google Glass, Digital eyeglasses). Because of this reason, the self-enhancing ability of coin might not be enough to trigger the moderating effect of narcissistic personality trait even among those who scored high on the NPI index. Different products should be used in the future studies to establish the moderating effect of narcissism on the likelihood to engage in negative WOM.

The first goal of Study 3 was to test the moderating effect product’s mode of consumption on the effect of narcissism (H2a and H2b). And second goal was to test whether
the level of narcissistic personality trait discourage people in any circumstance to discuss the product details with others (H3). The results from the first part of Study 3 supported H2a and H2b. When the product of interest was a privately consumed product, i.e., Novus zero gravity recliner, the moderating effect of narcissism on the relationship between the nature of relationship between participants and Pat, and the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat was mitigated. Whether Pat was a co-worker or a stranger did not make a significant in terms of the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat in both participants who scored low and those who scored high on the NPI index. On the other hand, when the product of interest was a publicly consumed product, i.e., the Google GLASS, the difference in terms of the likelihood of recommending the Google GLASS to Pat between when Pat was a co-worker and when Pat was a stranger became significant among those who scored high on the NPI index.

These results suggested that the mode of consumption of the products moderate the effect of narcissism on the likelihood of recommending the product to other. Specifically, the moderating effect of narcissism on the relationship between the nature of the relationship between WOM sender and WOM receiver, and the likelihood to recommend the product to others changed depending on the mode of consumption of the product of interest. Apparently, the moderating effect of narcissism only emerged when the product of interest was a public product. These results were consistent with narcissism literature. For the second part of Study 3, the results supported H3, which was hypothesized that the high level of individual’s narcissistic personality trait would not discourage people from discussing product details with others regardless of s of the nature of the relationship between the WOM sender and the WOM receiver was, and regardless of the type of product. The results from the regression
analysis (table 9) supported H3. The three-way interaction term among the nature of the relationship, the product type, and the NPI index was not significant, suggesting that when all factors were taken together, the level of narcissism did not make any significant difference in all circumstances, thus supported H3. However, there were some interesting insights that should be discussed briefly based on this particular analysis. The slope of product type (private vs. public) was significant, and positive. This suggested that the participants were more likely to discuss the product details with others when the product of interest was a publicly consumed product. Intuitively, people should feel more comfortable discussing with others about a publicly consumed product than a privately consumed product as the cost associated with discussing about privately consumed product could exceed the social capital gained from the information exchange (Gatignon and Robertson 1986). In some cases, discussing privately consumed product could reveal important private information about the WOM sender, causing embarrassment or negative image. Based on this notion, this particular result made a lot of sense. Next, the slope of the NPI index was significant, and positive, suggesting that higher level of narcissistic personality trait led to the higher likelihood of discussing product details. This was consistent with the characteristic of narcissists who love to draw attention by showing off about their knowledge to others. All of the results found in Study 3 were consistent with the results from a Study by Cheema and Kaikati (2010), where, instead of narcissism, need for uniqueness was tested. Based on these results from both studies, need for uniqueness and narcissism seem to have similar effects on the likelihood of recommending a product to others.

The goal of Study 4 was to test another moderator of the effect of narcissism, the status of the WOM receiver (H4a an H4b). In Study 4, the product of interest was a pair of digital
eyeglasses for heavy computer users with a fictitious brand name. The results from the regression analysis (table 10) coupled with the results from the spotlight analysis (figure 11 and 12) supported H4. The significance of the three-way interaction among the nature of the relationship, status, and NPI index confirmed the moderating effect of the status on the effect of narcissism. Specifically, when the status of Pat, the WOM receiver, was equal to that of the participant, the moderating effect of narcissistic personality trait on the relationship between the nature of the relationship between the WOM sender and the WOM receiver, and the likelihood of recommending the product to other emerged. Such moderating effect lowered the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat among those who scored high on the NPI index when Pat was a co-worker. However, in the scenario where the status of Pat was manipulated to be higher than that of the participants, the opposite pattern emerged. This time, the likelihood of recommending the product to Pat among those participants who scored high on the NPI index was significantly higher when Pat was a co-worker than when Pat was a stranger. Simply put, the higher status of Pat canceled the moderating effect of narcissism. These results were consistent with the characteristic of narcissists. One of the typical strategies that narcissists adopt to make themselves standout from other people is to associate themselves with high status individual. Therefore, when status was included in the picture, the situation changed. In this case, those participants who scored high on the NPI index might perceive the benefit of nurturing a relationship with Pat, whose status was perceived as higher, to outweigh the opportunity costs associated with recommending the product to Pat. In addition, when the influence of narcissism among those who scored high on the NPI index was cancelled, the conventional rule of the social exchange theory took control of the situation.
Specifically, the social capital gained from a social exchange, the product recommending in this case, was higher when social tie between both parties of exchange was strong than when the tie was weak. Therefore, it was reasonable to see those participants who scored high on the NPI index recommended the product to Pat more when Pat was a co-worker than when Pat was a stranger as the social capital gained from doing so was higher in the former case, especially when Pat knew a lot of celebrities. The marginally significant results of the two-way interaction between the nature of the relationship and the NPI index also consistent with the characteristic of narcissists, who tended to perceive a stronger threat from someone closer to them than from a random stranger, thus were less likely to recommend the product they perceived as a source of their specialness to their co-worker.

Managerial implications

Because its significant influences on consumers’ decision especially after the emerging of the social media, which allow people to easily share the information about products, companies, especially those relying on crowdfunding, such as Kickstarter.com, are relying more on the WOM communication among consumers rather than the conventional advertising channels (Godes and Mayzlin 2004). As a result, companies gain a lot of free WOM agents when through creating buzz marketing campaigns. However, by relying more on these WOM agents rather than the conventional advertising channels, companies have to sacrifice the control over the content that these WOM create, modify, and transfer to others. Based on the WOM literature pertaining the motivation to engage in WOM communication (e.g., Sundaram 1998), and the social exchange theory (Frenzen and Nakamoto 1993), most WOM agents are driven by their self-interest to engage in WOM communication. Apparently, it is impossible that every
single one of the WOM agents engage in WOM communication to help companies become more success. Some WOM agents might have their own hidden agenda when they transfer the information about the products or companies to others. It is important to understand the factors that can encourage or discourage these WOM agents to transfer favorable messages about the products or companies to others. And the results from this Study provide some useful insights that can help companies understand more about their WOM agents.

Although the results of this Study did not confirmed all predictions about consumers who scored high on the individual’s narcissistic personality trait, the ones that did were consistent with the literature of narcissism. In short, for the products that carry high self-enhancing ability, relying totally on WOM marketing campaigns might be risky as those who score high on narcissistic personality trait (average Joe narcissists) might, in some circumstances, not share nor recommend great products to their friends just because they want to be the only one to have those products. This is getting worse as many studies suggest that the society will see more and more of these average Joe narcissists over time. It might be safer for companies to diversify the risks by communicating with their target audiences through various channels. Creating buzz marketing campaign through YouTube can be a good alternative as it is impractical for those who review products on YouTube to limit others access to the product using the same strategy used in this Study.

Limitations and directions for future research

Due to the limited alternatives of the existing products have been scheduled to launch soon, i.e. coin, it was very difficult to test the propensity to engage in negative WOM of consumers. Only Study 2 examined this area in this entire Study, and unfortunately, the results
did not support the prediction. The Study should be much more interesting if the effect of individual’s level of narcissistic personality trait on the propensity to engage in negative WOM was established in this Study.

The next limitation is that the nature of the relationship between the WOM sender and the WOM receive was manipulated as only two group, i.e., stranger, or co-worker. That could limit the generalizability of the results from the Study. It could be more interesting to examine various types of relationship, such as childhood friends, Facebook friends, family members, or neighbor could make any difference in the results.

Although at the beginning of the online survey, the respondents were informed that the Study was about consumer’s product and promotion evaluation, the survey did not include a questions used to check for acquiescence bias by asking the participants whether they could guess the objective of the whole Study. Without the opportunity to control for that bias, the results from this Study might not be as robust as expected.

Although the Study controlled of the gender of “Pat,” by not using any pronoun that can indicate the gender of Pat in all scenarios, the effect of this control might be attenuated in Study 1 and Study 4. Because in those two studies, a silhouette image of a male person (as seen on male restroom sign) was used to represent all people in the videos, this might subconsciously influence the decision of the participants. It could be interesting to examine the difference of Pat’s gender.

Another limitation is about the product used on Study 1 was the Rolex watch. The profile of the participants in Study 1 (table 1), specifically the annual income of the participants, clearly suggested that it was almost impossible for them to actually own a Rolex watch
(approximately $35,000 as shown in the video) in reality. Because of that, the results from Study 1 might not reflect the real potential decisions of those participants if they were to own a Rolex and were to make a recommendation to others.

The last limitation is about the source of the participants. This Study used only one source to recruit participants for all studies, Amazon Mechanical Turk. Although there are no serious issues reported regarding the use of Amazon Mechanical Turk as the source of the data for the Study, the results of the Study should be more robust if the data were collected from a few different sources.
APPENDIX A

FULL VIDEO SCRIPT FOR STUDY 1
Everyone loves great deals! Mob-Drop, just launched a few weeks ago, is a new simple way to get a great deal for your purchase. Basically, Mob-Drop takes a group of people that each want to buy the same thing, combines their orders, and places one big order directly with the manufacturer. As a result, everybody in the group benefits from the large quantity price while only having to buy one. You just discovered Mob-Drop and bought several items from Mob-Drop recently.

To make its name go more viral, Mob-Drop decided to do something a bit crazy. At the beginning of this week, Mob-Drop randomly sent out a “limited special offer” to a very few of its existing customers. And “YOU”, yes, “YOU”, happen to be one among those few lucky people. The offer is that Mob-Drop agrees to refund half of the amount you paid for your last purchase if you can find someone who wants to purchase that same item from Mob-Drop within 3 days after receiving the offer. If you can do that, you get the refund, which is half of what you paid, and that person gets to buy that item at half price as well.

For example, say the last item you bought from Mob-Drop was $100. You know that if you can complete this task, Mob-Drop will give you back half of what you paid (that is $50 in this case). That means you will end up paying only $50 instead of $100 for this item. And the other person gets to buy this item at $50 as well. So, basically, all you have to do is to find someone who wants to buy this same item at half of the original price. That’s all! And guess what, who wouldn’t? It’s a win-win game!

The “co-worker” scenario reads:

Now, imagine this. Your last purchase from Mob-Drop was the latest model of a gorgeous Rolex watch. Ever since receiving it last week, everyone keeps complimenting your Rolex, especially your co-workers in a small-sized company with around 100 employees.

Right after you realized that you have just received this crazy limited offer from Mob-Drop through email, you looked up from your screen and found that “Pat,” one of your co-workers, was looking admirably at your Rolex, and said “That’s a gorgeous watch. I want to get one as well, but it’s too expensive. I would have gotten one had it been half-priced.”

You and Pat have many interactions at work and outside of work because you and Pat not only are responsible for similar types of tasks in this company, but also entered the company at about the same time.

The “stranger” scenario reads:

Now, imagine this. Your last purchase from Mob-Drop was the latest model of a gorgeous Rolex watch. Ever since receiving it last week, everyone keeps complimenting your Rolex, especially your co-workers in a small-sized company with around 100 employees.

Now you are at an airport waiting for your flight for a business trip. While you’re waiting, you receive this crazy limited offer from Mob-Drop through email on your cell phone. Then you look up from your screen and see that one of the passengers who is also waiting for a flight is looking admirably at your Rolex. You have never met this person before. And after a
moment, that person finally says “That’s a gorgeous watch. I want to get one as well, but it’s too expensive, I would have gotten it had it been half-priced.

After a short conversation, you learn that the person’s name is “Pat,” and that you and Pat started working at the same position and at about the same time, but in different companies.
APPENDIX B

ADDITION PRODUCT INFORMATION FOR STUDY 2 AND STUDY 3
Additional product information for Study 2.

Here is some more information about the "coin"

Here are some of the Pros and Cons based on several latest reviews of "coin" from the beta testers

Pros:
- Very convenient - one "coin" can hold up to 8 credit/store cards.
- Never forget your card at the restaurant again - "coin" will remind you through your cell phone.
- No more "flat" wallet - with "coin", a "flat" wallet can be achieved easily

Cons:
- Security issues - it is much easier to steal information from a "coin" than to create a fake credit card to commit financial fraud at a store/restaurant.
- "coin" cannot be used without a cell phone - additional steps are required to unlock "coin" when the cell phone is lost, or dies.
- No battery replacement - "coin" owner must buy a new "coin" every 2 years (approximately).
Additional product information for Study 3

Here is some more information about the Google GLASS

Pros:
- Slick and comfortable design
- Easy to take hand-free photos & videos
- Accurate voice recognition feature
- Cool head tracking navigation
- Some cool apps

Cons:
- Expensive (MSRP: $1,500)
- Limited number of apps
- Extremely conspicuous
- Poor battery life
- Poor camera performance in low-light conditions

Here is some more information about the Novus zero gravity recliner

Pros:
- Helps relax the spine by naturally decompressing vertebrae
- Helps extend the lung capacity, allowing for deeper, more relaxed breathing
- Helps relieve muscle tension, soreness, and fatigue
- Helps improve blood circulation by elevating legs above the heart

Cons:
- Durability issue, low quality leather can peel off after a couple of years
- A bit overpriced given the quality of the materials and craftsmanship (MSRP: $1,500)
- The replacement parts are extremely difficult to install
- The instruction manual is one among the worst, poor customer service from the manufacturer
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