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CONSUMERS' PROPENSITY TO POST FAKE ONLINE REVIEWS

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ABSTRACT

As the influence of online reviews on consumers increases, some companies ask people to write fake reviews, of their businesses or those of their competitors, and offer compensation in return. Such fake reviews have drawn the attention of regulators because they are likely to mislead consumers. In this study, we focus on the effect of different compensation benefits (i.e., incentives) on individuals' intentions to write fake reviews. We further examine the moderating role of a personal trait, sense of power, which influences a consumer's propensity to post a fake review. Using an experimental design, we test the proposed hypotheses and present the results. We then discuss theoretical contributions, managerial implications and limitations, and suggest avenues for future research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Word-of-mouth has a huge impact on consumer behavior (Berger, 2014; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009), and online reviews, a form of electronic word-of-mouth, have been widely recognized as the most impactful information source for consumer decision making (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006; Park & Lee, 2009). People trust other consumers' recommendations of a particular brand or product more than they trust company-generated communication (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). However, considerable evidence has been uncovered recently showing that some businesses generate fake reviews, a practice that undermines the credibility of online reviews in general. For example, a French food critic was fined $8,300 for posting a negative fake review of a Michelin-starred restaurant (Shah, 2015). What made this worse was that the review was posted 5 days before the restaurant's opening. Such unethical behavior has received attention from regulators, and there is growing interest in fraudulent or deceptive reviews in academia as well (e.g., Anderson & Simester, 2014; Luca & Zervas, 2015; Mayzlin, Dover, & Chevalier, 2012). While the issue of fake reviews is being investigated, researchers have not yet focused on consumers' motivation to engage in writing them. To fill this gap, we examine whether different incentives (i.e., self-benefitting vs. other-benefitting) influence consumers' propensity to write fake reviews. Moreover, we propose that an individual's sense of power, which refers to the capacity to control resources or outcomes in social relationships (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), influences his or her response to the two types of incentives. Although it is common sense that people are usually motivated by something that benefits them personally, we will demonstrate that

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individuals are also motivated by incentives that benefit others, depending on the power one possesses. Individuals in a low-power state could be more sensitive to monetary incentives since more resources could help them obtain power, whereas those in a high-power state could be more sensitive to charity incentives since they already have enough resources and power and want to be generous to others in order to maintain their status (Blader & Chen, 2012; Garbinsky, Klesse, & Aaker, 2014). Different levels of power are therefore associated with different intention levels with regard to posting fake reviews.

In the following chapter, we review the relevant literature on online reviews, unethical behavior, sense of power, and incentives that provide the conceptual foundation for this study. We explore research on online reviews and ethical issues in the online environment before discussing individuals' sense of power and the role of incentives.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Reviews

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and consumer reviews. Word-of-mouth (WOM) can be described as interpersonal communications between consumers concerning their personal experiences with firms or products (Richins, 1983; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998), or "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers" (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261). Past research has demonstrated powerful effects of WOM on consumers' attitudes and their behavioral intentions (e.g., Arndt, 1967; Bone, 1995).

In the Internet age, consumers share opinions and information with others via blogs and online review forums. Moreover, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have enabled people to share opinions and experiences on a one-to-world platform rather than a one-to-one platform (Dellarocas, 2003). Such communication can be described as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Unlike traditional WOM, eWOM includes many-to-many communication among individuals who may not know each other in real life (Chatterjee, 2001). Overall, online services have increased the speed and ease of interpersonal communication.

Online consumer reviews, which are a form of consumer generated content, are the most important and prevalent form of eWOM (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). They provide general information about products and services and contain recommendations (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007). Online reviews are considered to be a credible source due to their

perceived objectivity, as compared to information provided by marketers (Smith, Menon, & Sivakumar, 2005).

A vast amount of research has been performed on the influence of online reviews on consumer behavior. For instance, Godes and Mayzlin (2004) examined the impact of eWOM on new TV show viewership by highlighting the difference in the level of information in terms of the volume and dispersion of reviews. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) demonstrated the positive association between online book ratings and book sales. Moreover, Zhu and Zhang (2010) investigated the moderating effect of product and consumer characteristics on the relationship between online reviews and product sales. The authors found that three aspects of online reviews, including average rating, rating variation and number of reviews, have a greater influence on less popular products that are targeted at consumers with extensive Internet experience. From a different perspective, Angelis et al. (2012) and Alexandrov et al. (2013) highlighted the role of self-enhancement in consumers' motivation to write online reviews, such that people tend to generate positive WOM due to a need for self-enhancement, and negative WOM due to a need for self-affirmation.

Online consumer reviews in the hospitality industry. Hospitality-related products and services have been categorized as intangible and experience-based, since their attributes cannot be entirely assessed until they are purchased and being consumed (Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler, 2012). Due to these characteristics, consumers are more likely to rely on evaluations and recommendations from others in order to minimize uncertainty and perceived risk (Nelson, 1970; Murray, 1991). For example, people research and assess destinations of interest before they visit by referring to online review websites (Huang, Lurie, & Mitra, 2009). An example of such a

consumer opinion platform is TripAdvisor.com where people can obtain review information about hotels and restaurants (Gretzel, Yoo, & Purifoy, 2007).

Various aspects of online reviews are addressed in the hospitality literature. Gretzel and Yoo (2008), for example, illustrated the importance of online consumer reviews in different stages of trip planning, across gender and age differences. Ye et al. (2009) demonstrated the positive relationship between online reviews and hotel room sales. Levy et al. (2012) and Wei et al. (2013) studied hotels' responses to online reviews, and Kim et al. (2011) looked at consumers' motivation to read online hotel reviews. More recently, there has been a focus on effects of various peripheral cues of online reviews on consumers' decision-making processes, such as review valence and the reviewer's expertise (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), the reviewer's identity (Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011), and source credibility (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013; Zhang, Wu, & Mattila, 2014).

Recently, however, the prevalence of fake online reviews has begun to receive attention from the media and regulators because such reviews might mislead consumers. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) recently introduced endorsement guidelines, stating that "if there is a connection between an endorser and the marketer that consumers would not expect and it would affect how consumers evaluate the endorsement," an endorser should disclose that connection clearly (FTC, 2015, p. 2). Amazon.com recently filed a lawsuit against 1,000 consumers for posting fake reviews (Baird, 2015). To restore its damaged reputation, the company continues to fight against false and misleading reviews paid for by product sellers.

Unethical Behavior

Writing a fake review is an unethical behavior, which can be defined as an action that is "illegal or morally unacceptable to the large community" (Jones, 1991, p. 367). What is moral or not is malleable and depends heavily on social norms (Ayal & Gino, 2011). Research in social psychology has touched upon a variety of unethical behaviors. For example, Boles et al. (2000) investigated deception in repeated ultimatum bargaining and Yap et al. (2013) studied the effect of expansive "power poses" on stealing and cheating intentions as well as traffic violations. More generally, many scholars have investigated individuals' propensity to engage in lying behavior (e.g., Fischbacher & Föllmi-Heusi, 2013).

In the marketing literature, authors have studied firms' unethical behaviors and consumers' responses to such acts (Folkes & Kamins, 1999; Joergens, 2006). Schmalz and Orth (2012), for instance, investigated the important role of brand attachment in consumers' judgment of firms' ethics or lack thereof. Moreover, researchers have examined a wide range of unethical consumer behaviors, such as shoplifting and lying to a clerk or a company (Fullerton, Kerch, & Dodge, 1996; Steenhaut & Van Kenhove, 2005; Vitell & Rawwas, 1991; for a review, see Vitell, 2003). Others have examined cultural differences in the (un)ethicality of consumer behaviors (Babakus, Cornwell, Mitchell, & Schlegelmilch, 2004; Mitchell, Balabanis, Schlegelmilch, & Cornwell, 2009). Now that online shopping has become a mainstream activity, however, consumer behavior is no longer confined to brick-and-mortar settings. Accordingly, researchers have begun to investigate unethical behavior in online settings.

Unethical behavior in the online context. In a large body of research, scholars have examined ethical issues in the computer context (Adam & Ofori-Amanfo, 2000; Haines & Leonard, 2007). Such studies have covered topics ranging from soft lifting (i.e., software piracy;

e.g., Chiou, Wan, & Wan, 2012; Hinduja, 2003) to online retailers' ethics (e.g., Lu, Chang, & Yu, 2013; Román & Cuestas, 2008). Given the prevalence of online communication technology in our lives, associated ethics issues have emerged simultaneously. One such issue is "digital deception." Coined by Hancock (2007), digital deception refers to the "intentional control of information in a technologically mediated message to create a false belief in the receiver of the message" (p. 290). For example, an individual is more likely to lie about his or her appearance and/or identity when engaged in computer-mediated communication (e.g., Cornwell & Lundgren, 2001; Utz, 2005) as opposed to person-to-person communication.

Digital deceptions (a) "must be intentional or deliberate," and (b) "designed to mislead or create a false belief in some target" (Hancock, 2007, p. 290). Hancock stressed that digital deceptions are enacted via technologically mediated communication technology, such as email, chatrooms and weblogs. Based on this definition, fake online reviews can be categorized as digital deceptions.

Fake reviews are written to promote a business and deliberately mislead readers (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009). Evidence shows that online review forums are manipulated. For instance, a large proportion of book reviews on Amazon.ca have been written by the publishers and authors of the books in question (Harmon, 2004). Also, it is well-known that the music industry hires marketers who post positive opinions of new albums in online chatrooms and online forums (White, 1999). Fake reviews are an issue not only in the retail industry, but also in the hospitality industry. A hotel, for instance, can benefit from deceptively posting positive reviews about its own property and negative reviews about competing properties on TripAdvisor.com (Mayzlin et al., 2012; Yoo & Gretzel, 2009).

Mayzlin (2006) studied whether firms benefit by encouraging marketers to create promotional reviews or chat in online communities. According to her research, it is not beneficial to produce a high volume of deceptive reviews, since creating and posting such reviews is costly. Moreover, she found that eWOM remains persuasive despite misrepresentations in promotional reviews. Even though online communities might remain credible, the quality of information content is curtailed by distortions in deceptive reviews.

Dellarocas (2006) reported that firms that produce high-quality products are more engaged in strategic manipulative messaging than firms that produce low-quality products in order to signal their true quality to consumers. The author also demonstrated that social costs of strategic manipulations can be reduced by developing filtering technologies that increase the cost of manipulation and that encourage honest consumers' participation.

Researchers also have explored the detection of deception in online communities. Researchers in computer science and information technology have been actively developing automated identifier systems in order to filter out fake reviews (Hu, Bose, Koh, & Liu, 2012; Mukherjee, Liu, and Glance, 2012). In the hospitality context, Yoo and Gretzel (2009) compared deceptive reviews of a Marriott hotel created by students against actual reviews for the same hotel posted on TripAdvisor.com. The authors concluded that deceptive and actual reviews were different in terms of lexical complexity, use of first person pronouns, and use of brand names. Ott et al. (2011) also compared fake reviews of Chicago-area hotels written by subjects from Amazon's Mechanical Turk against actual reviews on TripAdvisor.com for the same hotel. Introducing new approaches to deceptive opinion detection, the authors reported that truthful reviews tend to include more sensory-laden and concrete language than deceptive reviews. They also observed that deceptive reviews were associated with higher usage of first person pronouns,

emphasizing the reviewer's presence in the review. The most recent study by Luca and Zervas (2015) used the fraud filter on Yelp.com to detect fake reviews. The authors found that promotional reviews, which have grown significantly over time, tend to be more extreme than other reviews.

Recently, researchers have examined the role of verified reviewers who actually purchased a product or experienced a service. In the context of a private label apparel company, Anderson and Simester (2014) found that approximately 5% of the reviews were posted by customers without any purchase records. Such reviews were more negative and contained deceptive linguistic cues, such as details unrelated to the product and multiple exclamation points. Similarly, in the hospitality industry context, Mayzlin et al. (2012) compared ratings of hotels on TripAdvisor.com and Expedia.com. Expedia.com requires the customer posting a review to have had an actual reservation at the hotel, whereas TripAdvisor.com does not, thus providing an environment more conducive to fake reviews. The main finding was that the reviews on TripAdvisor.com are more likely to be skewed to extreme points, a characteristic of fake reviews. Moreover, the authors reported that negative reviews are more prominent at hotels when their competitors deceptively inflate positive ratings on their properties.

Whereas several studies have examined various methods to detect deceptive reviews, to the best of our knowledge, researchers have not yet examined the review writers' perspective, specifically, the reviewer's motivation to post fake reviews. Therefore, in this study, we are interested in another form of fake reviews: those posted by consumers rather than by service providers. Specifically, we want to understand what factors influence consumer engagement in posting deceptive online reviews. We propose that an individual's sense of power is an important psychological mechanism in explaining his or her propensity to write fake reviews.

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Sense of Power

Power refers to asymmetric control over resources or other people in social relationships (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). These resources range from monetary resources to legitimate authority, depending on the context. The effects of power on human behavior have been extensively studied in the psychology and sociology literature (e.g., Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). In addition, researchers have investigated the influential role of power on consumer behavior in a variety of contexts. Power shapes consumers' information processing (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Briñol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007; Mourali & Nagpal, 2013; Mourali & Yang, 2013), as well as their behaviors (e.g., Garbinsky et al., 2014; Rucker, Dubois, & Galinsky, 2011; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Specifically, Anderson and Galinsky (2006) found that powerful individuals are more likely to engage in risky behaviors due to enhanced optimism about risks (e.g., unprotected sex). Mourali and Nagpal (2013) concluded that high-power consumers tend to focus on positive product features and adopt a choosing strategy (i.e., select a preferred option), whereas powerless consumers focus on negative features and adopt a rejecting strategy (i.e., fail to purchase the product or service). Moreover, Rucker and Galinsky (2008) demonstrated that low-power consumers are more likely to have a strong desire to acquire products (which are associated with status) in order to compensate for their lack of power, while powerful consumers are not heavily influenced by such desire.

Power and unethical behavior. Previously, researchers examined how social class and power influence individuals' ethical or unethical behaviors. In many studies, researchers found a theoretical link between power, status, and social class and similar effects of these constructs on

individuals' behaviors. For example, individuals with high socioeconomic status tend to feel more powerful than those with lower socioeconomic status (Kraus & Keltner, 2009) and powerless consumers are more likely to spend on others (e.g., when buying a gift) (Rucker et al., 2011), reflecting the effect of social class (Piff, Kraus, Cote, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010).

In general, previous studies on social class have revealed that individuals in higher social classes have a greater propensity to engage in unethical behaviors than individuals in lower social classes (Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008; Piff, Stancato, Cote, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012). For example, in Piff et al.'s (2012) experiment, participants played a game with a cash prize depending on the total score of five dice rolls. Higher-class individuals were more likely to report a total exceeding the actual sum than lower-class individuals. Likewise, power is also associated with unethical behavior, such as sexual harassment (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995), cheating to improve one's odds of winning (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010), and lying (Boles et al., 2000). Even taking an expansive pose that enhances one's sense of power (Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Guillory, 2011) increases the propensity of powerful people to engage in unethical behavior (Yap et al., 2013). Previous research has linked high-power individuals' inclination to engage in unethical behaviors to their self-focused orientation. Power holders tend to employ an agentic orientation and manifest self-assertion and direction toward their own goals (Rucker et al., 2012). Thus, to achieve their own goals or to maximize outcomes, powerful people engage in unethical behaviors.

On the other hand, such a notion is countered by evidence reporting that lower social class individuals are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors and that high-power individuals behave in benevolent ways. For instance, due to income inequality, low-social class individuals are more prone to engage in unethical behavior (e.g., Blau & Blau, 1982; Brush,

2007; Daly, Wilson, & Vasdev, 2001). Similarly, Yam et al. (2014) explained that people who are in a deprived physiological state (usually those in lower social classes) are more likely to commit unethical behaviors and to ignore conflicting goals (i.e., the moral dilemma) until the fundamental need is satiated. In addition, evidence in previous literature supports the claim that powerful people exert power in a socially responsible way by responding to needs of others, rather than wielding power in an immoral and selfish manner (Greenberg, 1978). High-power individuals help their subordinates by responding to their requests in organizations (Morris & Rosen, 1973), and cooperate with others in an altruistic fashion (Fisher & Nadler, 1974; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991).

In recent studies, scholars found that the behaviors of powerful individuals depend on their predispositions. For instance, Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh (2001) revealed that goals affect high-power individuals' behavior. To be specific, powerful individuals with an exchange orientation tend to behave self-servingly, whereas those with a communal orientation are likely to act on the basis of social responsibility. Likewise, Gardner and Seeley (2001) showed that power holders with an independent self-construal behave strategically, while those with an interdependent self-construal behave in a socially responsible manner. Handgraaf et al. (2008) argued that powerful individuals behave in a prosocial way when the counterpart is powerless because there is no threat to a high-power individual's outcome, whereas they pursue maximizing outcomes when the opponent also has power.

Incentives

In this study, we build upon these findings by examining how incentive type affects an individual's propensity to engage in unethical behavior (i.e., post fake reviews). In this research,

incentive type (i.e., self-benefitting vs. other-benefitting) is an independent variable. We operationalize a self-benefitting incentive as a monetary incentive in return for posting a fake review, and an other-benefitting incentive as a charity incentive, which is a form of contribution to a socially responsible organization in return for posting a fake review.

Money is a powerful tool that motivates people to behave in certain ways. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of monetary incentives to motivating employees or engaging them in task performance (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1997; 2003), as well as to business unit outcomes (Peterson & Luthans, 2006), social science research (Crano, 1991; Evangelista, Poon, & Albaum, 2012), and creative thinking (Eisenberger & Rhoades, 2001). These effects have been supported by evidence from neuroscience studies (e.g., Chib, Shimojo, & O'Doherty, 2014; Murayama, Matsumoto, Izuma, Matsumoto, & Smith, 2010; Pessiglione et al., 2015). Furthermore, past research in marketing has revealed that monetary incentives have a significant impact on generating positive WOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Jin & Huang, 2014; Wirtz & Chew, 2002).

Although monetary incentives can lead individuals to engage in socially responsible behaviors (e.g., Iyer & Kashyap, 2007), such incentives might backfire when used as justifications for unethical behaviors. Xie et al. (2014) explained that when there is a monetary incentive to engage in a moral transgression, the *ethical dissonance* (Barkan, Ayal, Gino, & Ariely, 2012) is smaller, thereby enabling people to justify immoral behaviors. When an immoral behavior is performed in exchange for a monetary incentive, money seems to share some of the blame and therefore the actor is perceived as less indecent (Xie et al., 2014). The authors supported this idea based on the claim that behavior performed for monetary reasons diminishes attributions of the behavior to intrinsic motives (Barkan et al., 2012). Such a notion is supported

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by other research investigating the link between monetary incentives and unethical behaviors (e.g., Kish-Gephart, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Martin, 2013; Shalvi, Gino, Barkan, & Ayal, 2015; Tenbrunsel, 1998; Winterich, Mittal, & Morales, 2014).

Another form of incentive, a charity incentive, has received less attention. In fact, as corporate social responsibility (CSR) emerges as a key strategy for firms, such an incentive is widely applied in cause-related marketing campaigns. For example, marketers often promise to donate a certain amount of an item's purchase price to a charity. The effects of charity incentives depend on donation framing and on the price of the bundled product (e.g., a bottle of shampoo vs. a color ink-jet printer) (Chang, 2008). Moreover, Strahilevitz and Myers (1998) found that, compared to monetary incentives, charity incentives are more effective in promoting hedonic products than utilitarian products. Previous studies also indicate that the effect of charity incentives on product choice is moderated by customers' involvement in the cause and customer-corporate identification (Lichtenstein, Drumwright, & Braig, 2004; Nicole, Stefan, & Hoyer, 2012).

Recent research in social psychology shows that the impact of social class and power on individuals' propensity to engage in unethical behaviors depends on whether the unethical behavior benefits the self or others (Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015). People of higher social class or high power are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors when such an act helps themselves rather than others. Conversely, individuals of lower social class or those who feel powerless are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors when the beneficiary is another person. These findings are congruent with the agentic-communal model of power (Rucker et al., 2012). Rucker et al. (2011) found that power influences self-importance and dependence on others, thereby accounting for differences in the propensity to dedicate resources to others.

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However, there are alternate motivations for individuals with different senses of power to engage in unethical behaviors. Powerful individuals have more resources and control, and therefore, they are less tempted by monetary rewards (Mandel, Petrova, & Cialdini, 2006). Hence, high-power individuals can be generous, be responsive to the needs of the powerless, and distribute resources fairly among them. Blader and Chen (2012) suggested that such a disposition of powerful individuals is driven by status-maintenance concerns. In order to maintain his or her status and power, a powerful person is involved in various altruistic activities through different forms of generosity (Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008). Since powerful people are approach-oriented to fulfilling their goals, having such a goal can motivate them to behave in the same manner. Consequently, charity incentives might induce individuals with high power to engage in unethical behaviors.

On the other hand, lower social class or powerless individuals who lack resources can have a higher willingness to fulfill their basic needs and restore their sense of power by acquiring more resources. Powerless people's desire to reinstate their sense of power is well demonstrated in previous research; one way in which they seek to fulfill this desire is through conspicuous consumption (Rucker & Galinsky, 2009). Individuals in a state of low power have more desire to acquire and save money when they have a goal of conspicuous consumption (Garbinsky et al., 2014). Accordingly, when low-power individuals are given monetary incentives, they can easily justify unethical behaviors (Xie et al., 2014), and therefore are more likely to engage in such behaviors. As a result, they can be much more sensitive to monetary incentives in return for their engagement in unethical behaviors than those with high power.

The Boundary Effect of Review Valence

Lastly, we claim that the interaction effect of power and incentive type will only apply to situations in which individuals are asked to post positive fake reviews. When people are asked to write negative fake reviews, we predict the above effect on individuals' likelihood of posting fake reviews to be attenuated. We expect that when asked to post negative fake reviews about competing establishments, consumers will be less likely to engage in unethical behaviors, regardless of their state of power or incentive type. This is because people are likely to perceive writing negative fake reviews of a property to be more unethical and immoral than writing positive fake reviews. When more moral dissonance exists, it can be difficult to justify unethical engagement (Barkan et al., 2012; Xie et al., 2014).

This prediction is based on previous literature demonstrating that self-enhancement is a strong motivation of both traditional WOM and eWOM (Alexandrov et al., 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram et al., 1998). Consumers want to be perceived positively and project themselves in ways that make good impressions. As such, people tend to share things that make them look good rather than bad (Berger, 2014). Accordingly, we predict that a situation where an individual is asked to post a negative review on a focal restaurant's competitor can affect one's motivation to write a negative review.

Taken together, we assume that the notion of power, unethical behavior, and incentives can be applied in the context of the burgeoning world of fake online reviews. We thus put forth the following hypotheses:

H1: Individuals will perceive posting a *negative* fake review about competing properties as more (a) unethical and (b) immoral than posting a *positive* fake review about clients' properties.

H2: When asked to post *positive* fake reviews, powerful (vs. powerless) individuals will be more likely to post a fake review when the incentive is other-benefitting (vs. self-benefitting).

H3: When asked to post *negative* fake reviews, the interacting effect of power and incentive type on one's likelihood of posting a fake review will be attenuated.
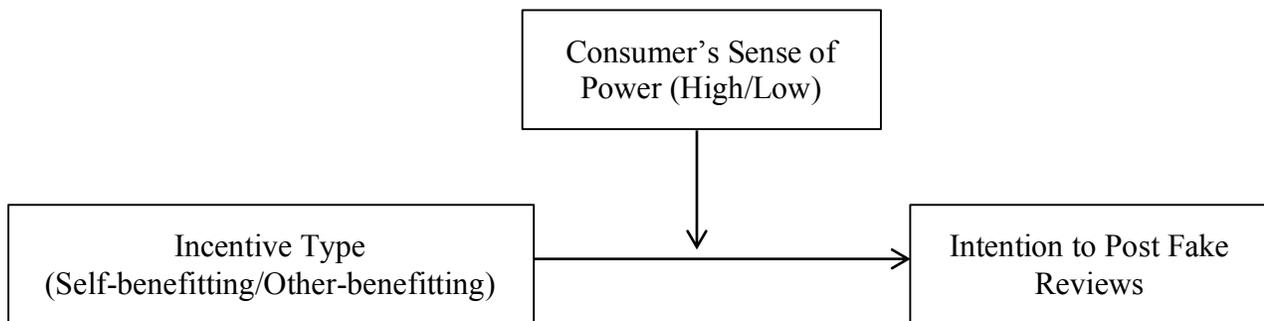

Figure 2-1. Conceptual model.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Pretest

We conducted a pretest to create self-benefitting and other-benefitting scenarios, which were used in Study 1 and Study 2. The purpose of the pretest was to verify that these scenarios did not differ in terms of ethicality and morality ratings.

Method. We created four scenarios using a 2 (review valence: positive vs. negative) × 2 (incentive type: self-benefitting vs. other-benefitting) between-subjects design describing a situation where a restaurant manager asks the study participant to write a fake review and offers an incentive in return (see Appendix A for a full list of scenarios). In the positive fake review scenario, the restaurant manager asks the participant to give the restaurant a 5-star rating and write a positive review, while in the negative fake review scenario, the manager asks the participant to give a competitor of the restaurant a 1-star rating and to write a negative review. The incentive is either a gift card (i.e., self-benefitting) or a donation to a local charity (i.e. other-benefitting). After reading the scenario, participants were asked to rate how they perceived the action in the scenario with four items measured using a 7-point semantic bipolar scale (e.g., ethical/unethical, moral/immoral, self-benefitting/other-benefitting, and selfish/altruistic; adapted from Dubois et al., 2015).

Analysis and results. We randomly assigned each of the 122 participants (48 female; $M_{age} = 33.25, SD = 11.71$) to one of the four scenarios. Table 3-1 presents the number of participants per cell.

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Table 3-1

Number of Participants per Cell in the Pretest

Experimental scenario		Cell size
Valence	Incentive type	
Positive	Self-benefitting	30
	Other-benefitting	32
Negative	Self-benefitting	32
	Other-benefitting	28

Table 3-2 presents the means and standard deviations of the pretest results. We conducted ANOVAs with *incentive type* as a factor. In the positive valence condition, participants in both the self-benefitting and other-benefitting condition perceived the scenario as equally unethical ($F(1, 60) = .26$, $p > .60$) and equally immoral ($F(1, 60) = .62$, $p > .40$). However, participants assigned to the self-benefitting incentive condition perceived the scenario as more self-beneficial ($F(1, 60) = 8.18$, $p < .01$) and selfish ($F(1, 60) = 3.27$, $p < .08$) than those who were assigned to the other-benefitting incentive condition. Similarly, in the negative valence condition, participants in the self-benefitting and in the other-benefitting condition perceived the scenario as equally unethical ($F(1, 58) = 2.39$, $p > .12$) and equally immoral ($F(1, 58) = 1.19$, $p > .27$). Again, participants assigned to the self-benefitting incentive condition perceived the scenario as more self-beneficial ($F(1, 58) = 25.05$, $p = .000$) and selfish ($F(1, 58) = 21.35$, $p = .000$) than those who were assigned to the other-benefitting incentive condition. In sum, the scenarios differed in terms of beneficiary, but not in terms of morality and ethicality ratings.

Table 3-2

Means and Standard Deviations of the Pretest

Experimental scenario		Moral/ Immoral		Ethical/ Unethical		Self-benefitting/ Other-benefitting		Selfish/ Altruistic	
Valence	Incentive type	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Positive	Self-benefitting	2.30	1.92	2.53	1.94	2.03	1.56	2.23	1.72
	Other-benefitting	2.53	1.63	2.91	1.80	3.31	1.93	3.06	1.88
Negative	Self-benefitting	1.53	1.24	1.63	1.16	1.47	1.02	1.44	1.01
	Other-benefitting	2.14	1.80	2.04	1.73	3.43	1.93	3.32	2.04

To test H1, we assigned different codes (0 = negative scenario, 1 = positive scenario) and ran another one-way ANOVA. The results indicated that participants who were assigned to negative scenarios perceived the given situations as more unethical ($M_{negative} = 1.82$ vs. $M_{positive} = 2.42$; $F(1, 120) = 4.03$, $p < .05$) and immoral ($M_{negative} = 1.82$ vs. $M_{positive} = 2.73$; $F(1, 120) = 8.97$, $p < .01$) than those assigned to positive scenarios. Thus, this finding supports Hypothesis 1.

Study 1

In Study 1, we tested the hypothesis that powerful individuals tend to post fake positive reviews when presented with other-benefitting incentives, while individuals who lack power tend to post fake reviews when presented with self-benefitting incentives.

Participants and procedures. We recruited 119 participants (54 female; $M_{age} = 34.13$, $SD = 11.18$) from Amazon's Mechanical Turk online subject pool. The experiment was a 2 (power: high vs. low) x 2 (incentive type: self-benefit vs. other-benefit) quasi-experiment design. Participants read one of the hypothetical scenarios, and then answered questions about their likelihood to post a fake review and demographic information.

Independent variables. Study 1 included two independent variables. To manipulate *incentive type*, we presented each participant with one of the two scenarios (incentive type: self-benefitting vs. other-benefitting) developed in the pretest. We measured participants' *power* using two items adapted from previous research (Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2010; Rucker & Galinsky, 2008). Specifically, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they felt powerful and in control in everyday life on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = powerless, lacking control; 7 = powerful, in control; $r = .81, p = .000$)

Dependent variable. The dependent variable in Study 1 was *likelihood of posting a fake review*. Participants were asked to respond to three items indicating the extent to which they would engage in posting a fake review using a 9-point Likert scale adapted from Karmarkar and Tormala (2010): "Please indicate how much you think you would like to write a review;" "Please indicate how interested you would be in writing a review" (1 = not at all, 9 = very much so); and "Please indicate the probability of writing a review" (1 = very low, 9 = very high) ($\alpha = .96$).

Control variables. We also controlled for *self-importance* and *dependence on others*, since it was suggested in previous literature that power is correlated with the two constructs (Rucker et al., 2011). We assessed self-importance using two items measured on an 8-point Likert scale adapted from Rucker et al. (2011): "How important are you as an individual?" (1 = not important at all, 8 = very important); and "I am a person of worth" (1 = totally disagree, 8 = totally agree) ($r = .69, p = .000$). We assessed dependence on others using two items measured on an 8-point Likert scale: "When it comes to getting things done, do you depend more on yourself or others?" (1 = completely on myself, 8 = completely on others); and "How much do you value people's opinions versus your own when making a decision?" (1 = my opinion matters most, 8 = others' opinions matter most) ($r = .51, p = .000$).

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Moreover, we included a global *mood* measure by asking participants how happy or sad they were feeling at the time of the experiment (1 = sad, 7 = happy). By doing so, we could rule out an alternative mechanism of the effect of mood on one's intention to engage in unethical behaviors (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973; Dubois et al., 2015).

Results and discussion. To assess each participant's likelihood of posting a fake review, we measured one's self-reported sense of power and performed spotlight analyses. Past research shows that performing a median split results in a substantial loss of statistical power from dichotomizing a continuous independent variable, which potentially leads to spurious results (Fitzsimons, 2008; Irwin & McClelland, 2001). Thus, we used a moderation model (Hayes, 2013; model 1) with incentive type as the independent variable, power as the moderator, intention to post a fake review as the dependent variable, and self-importance, dependence on others, and mood as covariates. The result showed a significant main effect for incentive type (B = -5.67, SE = 1.53, $p < .001$), such that participants were more likely to post fake reviews when presented with self-benefitting (vs. other-benefitting) incentives. However, the result showed no significant effect of power on posting a fake review (B = -.27, SE = .24, $p > .25$). More importantly, the interaction effect between power and incentive type was significant (B = 1.04, SE = .31, $p < .001$). The interaction remained significant when controlling for gender (B = 1.03, SE = .31, $p = .001$). Specifically, a sense of power positively predicted an individual's intention to post a fake review when presented with an other-benefitting incentive (B = .77, SE = .25, $p < .005$), while power did not predict individuals' likelihood of posting a fake review when presented with a self-benefitting incentive (B = -.27, SE = .24, $p > .25$).

In addition, spotlight analyses were conducted both at one standard deviation above the mean of measured power (i.e., high-power, M = 6.29) and at one standard deviation below the

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mean of measured power (i.e., low-power, $M = 3.16$). Among high-power individuals, there was

an insignificant difference between the effects of charity incentives and monetary incentives

($M_{self-benefitting} = 4.34$ vs. $M_{other-benefitting} = 5.23$; $t(112) = 1.33$, $p = .18$). However,

among low-power individuals, there was significant tendency to post fake reviews when the

incentive was self-benefitting (vs. other-benefitting) ($M_{self-benefitting} = 5.18$ vs.

$M_{other-benefitting} = 2.81$; $t(112) = -3.49$, $p < .001$). The interaction is depicted in Figure 3-1.

Table 3-3

Result of Moderation Test for Likelihood of Posting a Fake Review Using PROCESS (Model 1)

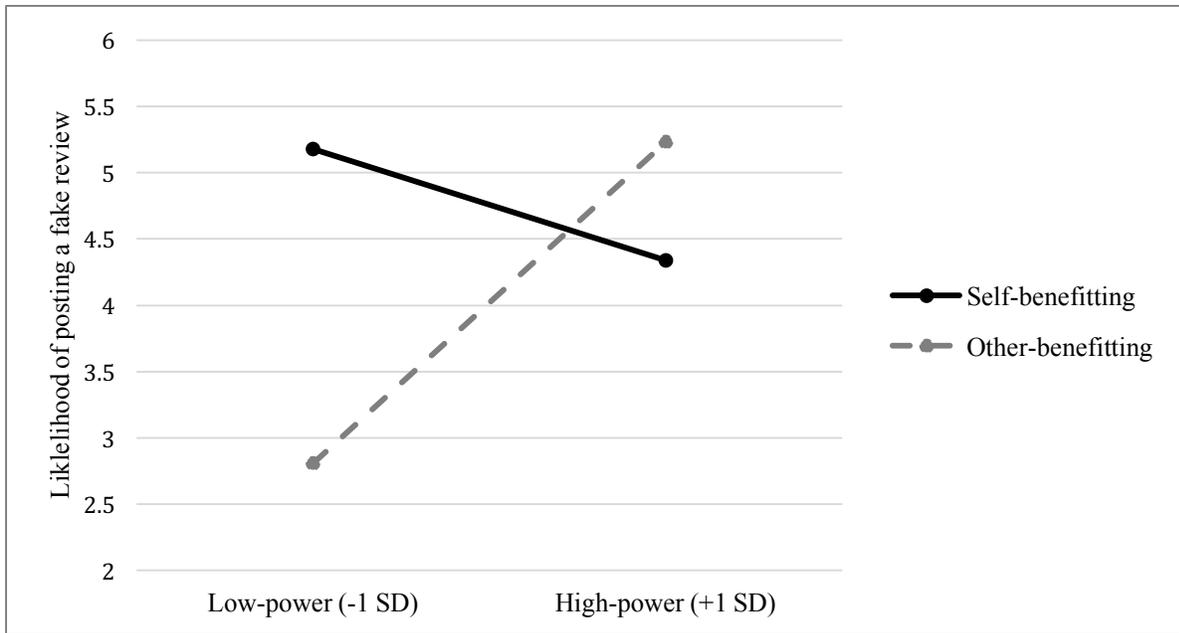| Variable	Coeff.	SE	t	p
Constant	5.80	1.34	4.33	.000
Power	- 0.27	0.24	-1.14	.26
Incentive	-5.67	1.53	-3.70	.000
Incentive * power	1.04	0.31	3.40	.001
Self-importance	- 0.36	0.18	-2.02	.05
Dependence on others	0.27	0.16	1.69	.09
Mood	0.29	0.12	2.36	.02

Figure 3-1. Likelihood of posting a fake review in Study 1 (power at ± 1 *SD*).

Overall, these results provide partial support for H2. Consistent with our predictions, powerless individuals were more likely to post a fake review when presented with a monetary (i.e., self-benefitting) incentive rather than a charity (i.e., other-benefitting) incentive. Unexpectedly, the incentive type had a minimal impact on powerful individuals' likelihood to post fake reviews. Their propensity to engage in such behaviors remained uniformly high across the two incentive conditions. Moreover, gender was significant as a control variable. This finding is supported by previous research proposing that males and females vary in their reasoning about moral dilemmas (Gilligan, 1982), such that women make more ethical judgments and behave more ethically than men (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010).

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to test Hypothesis 3, in order to determine whether a negative valence of the fake review would impact the individual's intention to post a review. We conducted Study 2 to examine whether review valence could alter the findings of Study 1.

Participants and procedures. We recruited 118 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, and excluded three responses based on the instructional attendance check task (IMC, Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009; see Appendix D). In total, we used data from a sample of 115 participants (54 female; $M_{age} = 35.49, SD = 12.50$) in the analysis. The participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (power: high vs. low) × 2 (incentive: self-benefit vs. other-benefit) between-subjects experimental design. The number of observations per condition is presented in Table 3-3. Participants completed the power priming task before responding to a power manipulation check item. Subsequently, each participant read an assigned scenario and responded to a series of questions.

Table 3-4

Number of Participants per Cell in Study 2

Experimental scenario		Cell size
Power	Incentive type	
High	Self-benefitting	27
	Other-benefitting	24
Low	Self-benefitting	32
	Other-benefitting	32

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Independent variables. We manipulated the independent variable of *power* by having participants complete a power recall task (Galinsky et al., 2003). In the high-power condition, participants were asked to recall and write about a time when they had power over others. In the low-power condition, participants were asked to recall and write about a time when they lacked power (see Appendix C). We performed a manipulation check using a single bipolar item measured on a 9-point scale: "The event recall task made me feel: powerful (vs.) powerless." We manipulated *incentive type* (self-benefitting vs. other-benefitting) using the scenarios developed in the pretest.

Dependent variable. We asked participants to indicate their *likelihood of posting a fake review* using the same scales as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .97$).

Control variables. Following Study 1, we controlled for *self-importance* ($r = .74$, $p = .000$), *dependence on others* ($r = .67$, $p = .000$) and *mood*.

Results and discussion. A two-tailed t-test on the power manipulation check revealed that high-power participants reported feeling more powerful than low-power participants ($M_{high-power} = 5.78$ vs. $M_{low-power} = 4.33$; $t(1, 113) = -4.33$, $p = .000$). We examined the effect of primed power and incentive type on participants' intentions to post fake reviews. The results of a two-way ANCOVA showed no main effect of power ($F(1, 108) < 1$) or incentive type ($F(1, 108) < 1$). Moreover, the interaction effect of power and incentive type was not significant ($F(1, 108) = 1.50$, $p = .22$). The effects of self-importance, dependence on others, and mood also were not statistically significant ($F(1, 108) = .04$, $p = .84$, $F(1, 108) = 2.71$, $p = .10$, and $F(1, 108) = .03$, $p = .87$, respectively).

Overall, the results of Study 2 show the same trend as Study 1. However, the interaction effect of power and incentive type on an individual's likelihood to post a fake review was not

statistically significant. Notably, the propensity to post fake reviews among both high- and low-power individuals remained low (i.e., mean scores less than 3.0) across the two incentive conditions. This finding can be corroborated by the results of the pretest that participants considered writing a negative fake review of a client's competitor to be more unethical and immoral than writing a positive fake review.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research was to identify the effect of incentive type (i.e., self-benefitting vs. other-benefitting) on consumers' intentions to post fake reviews and to determine whether an individual's sense of power plays a moderating role in that association. The results of Study 1 show that powerless individuals are more likely to write fake reviews when presented with monetary (i.e., self-benefitting) incentives than when presented with charity (i.e., other-benefitting) incentives. However, powerful consumers were not impacted by incentive type. Consequently, H2 was only partially supported. The results for the powerless are consistent with previous social psychology research stating that individuals with a low sense of power desire to acquire valuable resources in order to restore power (Garbinsky et al., 2014; Rucker & Galinsky, 2009). The findings of Study 2 support H3: when asked to post negative fake reviews, the joint impact of power and incentive type on an individual's intention to post a fake review is attenuated. This result is congruent with previous research on WOM and self-enhancement theory in which scholars have suggested that an individual wants to be perceived as a "good person" and therefore shares things that make him or her look good rather than bad (Berger, 2014).

We make two theoretical contributions with this study. First, in previous empirical research, scholars focused on patterns among fake reviews, such as linguistic characteristics. However, there is a lack of understanding about what motivates consumers (as opposed to companies) to post fake reviews. We proposed that monetary (self-benefitting) and charity (other-benefitting) incentives—two prevalent marketing practices—are main drivers of consumer

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participation in writing fake reviews. Second, our findings reveal that one's sense of power plays an important role in moderating the relationship between incentive type and a consumer's likelihood to post a fake review. Specifically, powerless individuals are more likely to engage in such unethical behaviors when presented with self-benefitting (vs. other-benefitting) incentives. This finding is incongruent with Dubois et al.'s (2015) results. Focusing on modality of different power (i.e., agentic vs. communal), Dubois et al. (2015) found that high-power individuals tend to engage in unethical behaviors when the behaviors benefit the self, whereas low-power individuals tend to engage in unethical behaviors when the behaviors benefit others. Our findings suggest that such fundamental modalities are not always applicable in human thinking and behavior, especially in situations of unethical engagement. We focused on major motivations of people with different levels of power (i.e., acquiring resources in order restore power vs. maintaining status) and found the reverse interacting effect of power and incentive type on engagement in unethical behaviors. Therefore, our findings reveal that chronic needs and motivations can guide a person to engage in unethical behaviors (Blader & Chen, 2012; Garbinsky et al., 2014; Keltner et al., 2008).

The present research has several practical implications. First, many third-party firms have emerged that offer reputation management services to hotels and restaurants. Their business strategy is to help their clients by collecting feedback from customers and posting such feedback on online review forums, such as Yelp.com and TripAdvisor.com. A classic way to motivate customers to write reviews is to distribute emails that include monetary incentives, such as gift cards or discount coupons. Although their goal is to obtain genuine evaluations from customers, our findings suggest that this method can unintentionally motivate individuals (especially powerless consumers) to write fake reviews. Furthermore, when a consumer responds to an

email request and writes a review, TripAdvisor.com adds the sentence: "Review collected in partnership with this restaurant."[1] However, such a cue may backfire, because consumers might infer that the review is fake. Second, as others have suggested (Anderson and Simester, 2014; Mayzlin et al., 2014), online review forum practitioners might want to follow Expedia.com and allow only verified purchasers to post a review. However, this strategy may lead to inadvertent consequences of reducing the number of reviews (Mayzlin et al., 2014). Finally, online review forums can use powerful preventative messages (e.g., "If your review turns out to be a fake review, you will be fined $XXX)[2].

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[1] For details, see TripAdvisor's official press release, available at http://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-i5966-c1-Press_Releases.html

[2] At Yelp.com, a message is embedded in the text-entry box, which reads: "Please don't review this business if you received a freebie for writing this review, or if you're connected in any way to the owner or employees." At Tripadvisor.com, reviewers must agree to the following statement before submitting a review: "I certify that this review is based on my own experience and is my genuine opinion of this restaurant, and that I have no personal or business relationship with this establishment, and have not been offered any incentive or payment originating from the establishment to write this review. I understand that TripAdvisor has a zero-tolerance policy on fake reviews."

CHAPTER 5

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As with any research, the present study is not without limitations. First, the study was based on self-reported data, which may or may not accurately describe how individuals act in real situations. Thus, future research should develop methods that reflect more realistic situations, for instance, by sending emails to a random online sample and recording their responses. Second, the scenarios of our study were not exhaustive enough to support the boundary effect of review valence. This is because the past research found that positive fake reviews are more prevalent only when a restaurant's reputation is less established. Therefore, in the future, researchers should specify the market situation of a property in a hypothetical scenario. Third, this study is based on only one context, which is a local restaurant, resulting in limited generalizability of the findings. Future research should be extended to other contexts (e.g., hotels and resorts) to enhance the generalizability of our findings. Fourth, we did not examine linguistic characteristics in fake reviews, which can be an interesting way to detect fake reviews. Thus, in the future, researchers should investigate the effect of power and incentive type on reviewers' writing styles in fake reviews.

APPENDIX A

Scenarios

One day, you found a flyer (advertisement) from a restaurant in town that you have <u>NEVER PATRONIZED</u>. The message reads as followed:

1. Positive valence

(1) Monetary incentive (i.e., self-beneficiary)

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

WANT TO EARN SOME EXTRA CASH?

ABC Restaurant would like to invite you to participate in posting an online review.

We strive to earn a **5-STAR RATING and POSITIVE REVIEWS from you!**

In return, you will receive a **$10 gift card** to a national retailer.

If you wish to participate, go to 'yelp.com/writeareview/biz/abc' to begin posting a review, and contact us at abc@abc.com.
(Please don't mention the monetary incentive on your review)

Don't miss this chance!

ABC Restaurant

</div>

(2) Charity incentive (i.e., other beneficiary)

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

WANT TO HELP SOMEONE IN NEED?

ABC Restaurant would like to invite you to participate in posting an online review.

We strive to earn a **5-STAR RATING and POSITIVE REVIEWS from you!**

In return, we will make a **$10 contribution to the local food bank**.

If you wish to participate, go to 'yelp.com/writeareview/biz/abc' to begin posting a review, and contact us at abc@abc.com.
(Please don't mention the contribution on your review)

Don't miss this chance!

ABC Restaurant

</div>

2. Negative valence

(1) Monetary incentive

WANT TO EARN SOME EXTRA CASH?

Do you really think **XYZ** is a good restaurant?

Give a **1-STAR RATING and NEGATIVE REVIEWS on XYZ**.

In return, you will receive a **$10 gift card** to a national retailer.

If you wish to participate, go to 'yelp.com/writeareview/biz/XYZ' to begin posting a review, and contact us at abc@abc.com.
(Please don't mention the monetary incentive on your review)

Don't miss this chance!

(2) Charity incentive

WANT TO HELP SOMEONE IN NEED?

Do you really think **XYZ** is a good restaurant?

Give a **1-STAR RATING and NEGATIVE REVIEWS on XYZ**.

In return, we will make a **$10 contribution to the local food bank**.

If you wish to participate, go to 'yelp.com/writeareview/biz/XYZ' to begin posting a review, and contact us at abc@abc.com.
(Please don't mention the contribution on your review)

Don't miss this chance!

Scales

Likelihood of posting a fake review (Study 1: $\alpha = .96$; Study 2: $\alpha = .97$)

Please indicate…

How much you think you would like to write a review.

How interested you would be in writing a review.

Please indicate the probability of writing a review.

Self-importance (Study 1: $r = .69$, $p = .000$; Study 2: $r = .74$, $p = .000$)

How important are you as an individual?

I am a person of worth

Dependence on others (Study 1: $r = .51$, $p = .000$; $r = .67$, $p = .000$)

When it comes to getting things done, do you depend more on yourself or others?

How much do you value people's opinions versus your own when making a decision?

Self-reported power (Study 1: $r = .81$, $p = .000$)

In general, how do you feel in your everyday life?

1 = powerless 2 3 4 5 6 7 = powerful

1 = lacking control 2 3 4 5 6 7 = in control

APPENDIX C

Power Priming Task

1. High-power

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals.

By power, we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something they wanted, or were in a position to evaluate those individuals. Please describe this situation in which you had power— what happened, how you felt, etc.

2. Low-power

Please recall a particular incident in which someone else had power over you.

By power, we mean a situation in which someone had control over your ability to get something you wanted, or was in a position to evaluate you. Please describe this situation in which you did not have power— what happened, how you felt, etc.

APPENDIX D

Instructional Attendance Check

Most modern theories of decision-making recognize the fact that decisions do not take place in a vacuum. Individual preferences and knowledge, along with situational variables can greatly impact the decision process. In order to facilitate our research on decision-making, we are interested in knowing certain factors about you, the decision maker. Specifically, we are interested in whether you actually take the time to read the directions; if not, then some of our manipulations that rely on changes in the instructions will be ineffective. So, in order to demonstrate that you have read the instructions, please ignore the sports items below. Instead, simply click on 'continue' button. Thank you very much.

Which of these activities do you engage in regularly? (select all that apply)

[ ] skiing [ ] soccer [ ] snowboarding [ ] running [ ] hockey [ ] football [ ] swimming

[ ] tennis [ ] basketball [ ] cycling

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