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RESEARCH ARTICLE

How rejected recommendations shape recommenders' future product intentions

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Abstract

When a consumer (a recommender) recommends a product to another consumer (a recommendee), it is not uncommon to learn whether the recommendee chose the recommended option (i.e., accepted the recommendation) or a different option (i.e., rejected the recommendation). Our research examines how rejected recommendations affect recommenders' subsequent intentions toward the originally recommended product. We find that upon learning one's recommendation was rejected, recommenders are less likely to repurchase or choose the product in the future. This negative effect emerges because recommenders question their knowledge about the recommended product (i.e., self-perceived expertise is reduced). Such questioning is more likely to occur when the recommendee is a close other and less likely to occur when the recommended product is perceived to primarily differ from alternatives due to subjective preferences (i.e., horizontal differentiation is salient). Importantly, this rejected recommendation effect is shown to be distinct from a social proof account. The current research contributes to WOM theory by identifying a novel outcome of recommendation interactions—rejected recommendations—and by demonstrating that this outcome can cause consumers to shift away from a product despite having felt positively enough about the product to recommend it to others.

KEYWORDS

product differentiation, psychological closeness, recommendations, rejected recommendation, self-perceived expertise, social influence, social proof, word of mouth

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are chatting with a friend who tells you she is looking for a new travel coffee mug. She asks you to recommend a good travel mug, and because you really like the mug you have, you recommended the same one to your friend. You leave the interaction feeling good that you were able to use your own experience to help your friend solve a problem and purchase a quality product. Later, however, you discover that she ended up choosing a different mug, rejecting your recommendation! How might you react when you learn this, and how might it influence your decision-making the next time you need to buy a travel mug?

A recommendation is a specific form of word of mouth (WOM), wherein a consumer suggests a product or brand to a specific other consumer (Yeomans, 2019). Recommending is a common behavior—55% of consumers report recommending a product to a friend or family member at least once per month and 30% report doing so weekly (Baer & Lemin, 2019). Given this prevalence, research has focused on why consumers share recommendations (Berger, 2014; Brown et al., 2005) and how they integrate the recommendations they receive into their own decision-making (e.g., Iyer & Griffin, 2021; Zhao & Xie, 2011). Meanwhile, relatively little research has considered the consequences for the *sharer* of making recommendations (or sharing other WOM). The limited research in this area examines how the manner in which WOM is shared influences the sharer's subsequent perceptions of the recommended product (e.g., Moore, 2012; Shen & Sengupta, 2018). The present

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research contributes to this literature by exploring how a recommendee's product decision (i.e., the choice of a WOM recipient) affects the recommender's (i.e., WOM sharer's) subsequent product decisions.

Compared to other forms of WOM (i.e., online product reviews), recommendations are more targeted to specific others (Yeomans, 2019). This is one reason recommendations are generally sought and shared within preexisting relationships (Liu & Gal, 2011). The relational nature of recommendations also means that recommenders can learn the recommendee's choice more often than might be expected from other WOM. When the recommendee's choice is not congruent with the recommendation, we refer to this as a rejected recommendation.

How might recommenders respond to a rejected recommendation? Extant WOM research suggests that those who share positive WOM are relatively loyal to the products they recommend (de Matos & Rossi, 2008). This loyalty is driven by their own positive product experiences and because WOM serves as a public commitment to the product (Baca-Motes et al., 2013). Contrary to this position, we contend that recommenders are highly sensitive to the decision of their recommendee and that rejected recommendations impact recommenders strongly enough to overcome these factors to ultimately reduce their future intentions toward the product. We suggest this occurs as a function of updated self-perceptions in the form of reduced perceptions of expertise related to the focal product. Returning to the opening example, learning your friend rejected your recommendation might lead you to question your expertise about travel mugs, thus possibly reducing your likelihood to repurchase that type of mug in the future. We propose that these reduced product intentions will result even though you were happy with your experience with the mug and felt strongly enough about that experience to recommend it to your friend.

This research contributes to theory in multiple ways. First, it augments the WOM literature by identifying and exploring a novel outcome of consumer WOM interactions—rejected recommendations—wherein WOM sharers' behaviors are negatively affected by learning that their WOM suggestions are not followed. Second, we identify two theoretically driven boundary conditions that influence how and when this rejected recommendation effect manifests: psychological closeness (Aron & Aron, 1986) and salience of horizontal product differentiation (Spiller & Belogolova, 2017). Third, we contribute to a nascent literature that considers how interactions in the WOM environment affect WOM sharers. By applying a social influence lens to WOM sharing, we show that rejected recommendations can lead those who share positive WOM (and who should thus be loyal to the product) to reduce future intentions toward the recommended product. Importantly, we demonstrate that this effect is distinct from a social proof account (Cialdini, 1984), in that it exerts influence beyond that associated with simply learning of another's divergent choice. Last, our findings have implications for consumer well-being. Since rejected recommendations lead recommenders to question their expertise, there may be detrimental effects on recommenders' self-perceptions, leading them to shift away from products they might otherwise value.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Word of mouth

WOM has long been recognized as important to marketers (e.g., Arndt, 1967; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Thus, considerable research focuses on predicting when and why consumers share WOM (see Berger, 2014, for review) and how they integrate others' WOM into their decision-making (e.g., Iyer & Griffin, 2021; Zhao & Xie, 2011). Recently, research has also started to consider how sharing WOM impacts the sharer. An initial finding in this domain is that offering WOM enhances the sharer's social self-perceptions (Chawdhary & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2015). Additionally, when WOM is shared orally (vs. in writing), the sharer's sense of connection with the promoted brand is strengthened (Shen & Sengupta, 2018). Further, using explanatory language in WOM allows consumers to better understand their prior experiences, often negatively affecting WOM sharers' post-hoc evaluations of hedonic experiences and polarizing evaluations of utilitarian experiences (Moore, 2012). Last, when WOM sharers feel obligated to consider the recipient's preferences, the effortful nature of perspective-taking can result in a negative hedonic experience, especially when the recipient's preferences diverge from those of the sharer (Yeomans, 2019).

Collectively, this prior research considers how the perceptions of WOM sharers are affected by the sharer's own WOM behaviors. Meanwhile, little research has considered how WOM sharers' perceptions might be affected by the behaviors of WOM *recipients*. One exception found that negative product evaluations can be mitigated by product-related conversations with another consumer about their positive experience with the same product (Brannon & Samper, 2018). This effect, however, requires both parties to have consumed the product and then engaged in a detailed discussion of their unique experiences. The present research instead considers the consequences that emerge when a WOM sharer simply learns about the choice of the WOM recipient.

Recommendations: Individually tailored WOM

Recommendations are a specific form of WOM involving a consumer (the recommender) suggesting a product,

service, or brand to a specific other consumer (the recommendee), based on perceptions of the recommendee's preferences (Yeomans, 2019). Although some WOM consists of relatively impersonal communication to a broad audience (e.g., online reviews), recommendations are personalized and require recommenders to have some level of knowledge about the recommendee (Yeomans, 2019). Therefore, consumers tend to solicit and provide recommendations within preexisting and ongoing relationships (Liu & Gal, 2011). Given these relationships, recommenders typically continue to interact with recommendees after providing a recommendation and thus have a reasonable likelihood of learning whether the recommendee's choice aligns with their recommendation.

Consumer responses to rejected recommendations

When people provide recommendations to others, they typically assume their guidance is not only good but also that it will be followed (Mullen, 1983). Thus, learning one's recommendation was not followed (i.e., was rejected) should promote causal elaboration (Wong & Weiner, 1981) wherein recommenders consider why. Given recommendations are generally provided within existing relationships, recommenders may be hesitant to direct blame toward the recommendee, as that may harm their relationship (e.g., Murray et al., 2006). Incorrectly externalizing blame may also leave the recommender vulnerable to giving poor advice to other consumers in the future. Instead, we propose recommenders will internalize a rejected recommendation by interpreting it as a signal that their recommendation was not good enough and that their expertise related to the focal product is lower than previously believed.

Consumer expertise

Consumer expertise refers to one's ability to perform product-related tasks successfully (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). Like intelligence and knowledge, expertise entails the acquisition of information and the development of cognitive structures. Expertise additionally consists of leveraging this information to realize positive marketplace outcomes (e.g., make good decisions, find better information, and process information more quickly; Alba & Hutchinson, 2000). Expertise is a characteristic that one may assess either externally (i.e., assessing another's expertise; Krauss & Fussell, 1991) or internally (i.e., self-perceived expertise; Atir et al., 2015). Expertise also has both objective and subjective components. Objective expertise refers to a consumer's actual knowledge and abilities, while subjective expertise refers to what a consumer believes they know and can do (Brucks, 1985). The two are not always highly correlated, with subjective perceptions of expertise more prone to fluctuate based on one's experiences (Park et al., 1994). We propose that a rejected recommendation is one such experience that will affect recommenders' perceptions of their own subjective expertise related to the focal product, hereafter referred to as self-perceived expertise.

Rejected recommendations reduce self-perceived expertise

When consumers recommend, they often do so because they had a positive experience with the product (Chen et al., 2017) and believe it to be relatively high in quality (Tripathi, 2017). Such experiences can inflate one's self-perceived product knowledge (Marks & Kamins, 1988). Moreover, when asked for advice in a specific domain, individuals often assume the other party perceives them to be knowledgeable about that domain, which further inflates self-perceived expertise (Brooks et al., 2015). This leads recommenders to not only assume that they provide good advice but also that the recipient will follow their advice (Mullen, 1983).

When a recommendation is rejected, it challenges the belief that one is knowledgeable and offers sound advice. When consumers encounter information that is inconsistent with their initial assessment, this leads them to update said assessment (Hoffrage et al., 2000; Pirmoradi & McKelvie, 2015). A natural consequence of a rejected recommendation would thus be for recommenders to question their credibility as a WOM source, their ability to make good choices within the product category, or their ability to accurately evaluate their own experience with the product (Huneke et al., 2004). Thus, we propose that a rejected recommendation will reduce the recommender's self-perceived expertise.

When consumers believe they have less expertise in a product category, they are less confident in their choices in that category, which results in increased switching among alternatives and decreased loyalty (Bell et al., 2005). Switching also occurs because trying new options facilitates learning in the category, which can boost expertise (Clarkson et al., 2013). Taking these observations and tendencies together, we propose that following a rejected recommendation, recommenders will be less likely to repurchase or choose their initially recommended product, and this effect will occur as a function of reduced self-perceived expertise. Formally,

> **H1.** A rejected (vs. accepted) recommendation will reduce the recommender's future intentions toward the recommended product.

> **H2.** The negative effect of a rejected recommendation on future product intentions will be mediated by reduced self-perceived expertise.

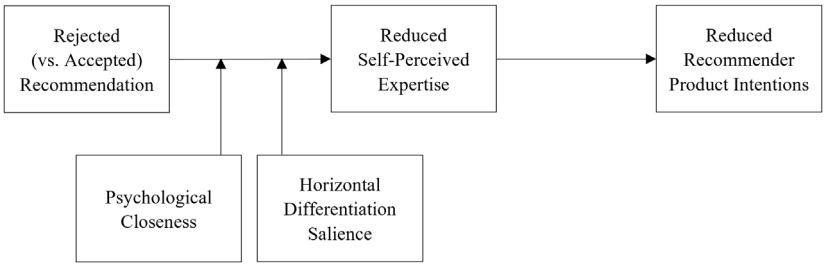

FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework for the effect of rejected recommendations on recommenders' future product intentions.

The moderating role of psychological closeness

Our theoretical model proposes that rejected recommendations reduce recommenders' future product intentions via decreased self-perceived expertise. However, it is unlikely all rejected recommendations will elicit this response to the same degree. One factor we expect to determine the extent to which self-perceived expertise is affected is the psychological closeness between the recommender and recommendee. Psychological closeness refers to one's feelings of attachment to and perceived connection with another person (Aron et al., 1991). When an individual feels close to another, the behaviors of that other have an especially strong influence on one's sense of self (Aron & Aron, 1986). When a close other rejects one's recommendation, this should elicit heightened feelings of threat, self-doubt, and other negative self-perceptions (Murray et al., 1998). We expect a rejected recommendation from a closer (vs. more distant) other to have a stronger negative effect on recommender self-perceived expertise, which will in turn have a stronger negative effect on subsequent recommender product intentions. Formally,

> **H3.** The negative effect of a rejected recommendation on the recommender's future product intentions will be moderated by psychological closeness, such that the effect will be stronger when the recommendee is a closer (vs. more distant) other.

The moderating role of product differentiation salience

We also note that consumers vary in the extent to which they perceive a given product to differ from its alternatives primarily as a matter of quality (i.e., objective superiority of an option or "vertical differentiation") or taste (i.e., alignment of a product with one's subjective preferences or "horizontal differentiation"; Tirole, 1988). Importantly, these perceptions are not fixed but vary from consumer to consumer and can shift based on the salience of a product's quality or taste-based attributes (Spiller & Belogolova, 2017). Further, vertical and horizontal differentiation are not always orthogonal. For example, within a category like automobiles, there can be a high degree of both vertical (e.g., Lexus/Mercedes vehicles are objectively better) and horizontal differentiation (some customers prefer SUVs, while others prefer sedans).

We suggest that when consumers experience a rejected recommendation, they are more inclined to consider vertical aspects of differentiation. This is because the act of seeking a recommendation implies the recommendee believes that, even accounting for one's personal preferences, objective differences in product quality exist. That is, if the optimal choice is simply a matter of personal preference, then recommendees would not seek advice, for they know their own preferences best. When vertical differentiation is salient, the negative effect of a rejected recommendation should emerge if the recommender interprets the recommendee's divergent choice as a signal that a higher-quality option was chosen. Alternatively, if the degree to which the product is horizontally differentiated from its alternatives is made salient to the recommender, a rejected recommendation can instead be explained by the recommendee having idiosyncratic preferences. This explanation represents less of an indictment of the recommender's expertise and should thus serve to mitigate the impact of a rejected recommendation on future product intentions (see Figure 1 for conceptual model). Formally,

> **H4.** The negative effect of a rejected recommendation on the recommender's future product intentions will be moderated by product differentiation, such that the effect will be mitigated when horizontal differentiation is made salient.

Potential alternative explanations

While we propose rejected recommendations will reduce recommenders' future product intentions via reduced self-perceived expertise, we acknowledge this may not be recommenders' sole response to a rejected recommendation. First, it is possible that simply observing another's

divergent choice would lead recommenders to shift away from their preferred option due to updating beliefs about either product quality or normative behavior in the category (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Burnstein & Vinokur, 1975). In other words, a recommendation might not be needed to trigger this process. While such informational and normative social influence effects are well-established (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), we propose a rejected recommendation will exert a distinct effect beyond these. When consumers simply observe another's divergent choice (in the absence of recommending), they are less invested in that choice and less likely to interpret it as a negative signal of their *own* credibility as a WOM source (i.e., they should not question their expertise to the same degree). We test this alternative explanation and demonstrate the unique effect of rejected recommendations in Studies 1a–1c.

Second, because consumers use others' divergent choices to make inferences about the quality of the purchased product (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975), a rejected recommendation might simply be interpreted as a signal that the recommended product is of lower quality than initially believed (and the other's choice is *not* internalized as reflective of expertise). Such product-quality inferences would also reduce the recommender's subsequent intentions to purchase this product. We do not believe, however, that these quality inferences will solely explain reduced product intentions following a rejected recommendation. Rather, we propose the negative self-inferences stemming from reduced self-perceived expertise will have a unique effect on recommenders' product intentions beyond any quality inferences. This is because individuals prioritize coping with self-threat—as would arise when one's expertise is challenged—before worrying about other signals in their social environment (Bandura, 1989). Thus, while an informational social influence account (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975) suggests product-related inferences stemming from a rejected recommendation might influence future product intentions, we propose our hypothesized self-perceived expertise process will play a more critical role in predicting said intentions. We test this in Studies 2a and 2b.

Third, when individuals feel rejected by another, they generate negative evaluations of those who have rejected them (Bond et al., 2006; Fein & Spencer, 1997). For example, in the management domain, learning that one's advice was ignored leads more senior advisors to negatively evaluate more junior advisees (Blunden et al., 2019). That line of work suggests that a rejected recommendation will potentially offend the recommender. While some feelings of offense might result, these are unlikely to carry through to future product intentions. We test this competing account in Studies 2a and 2b. In summary, while rejected recommendations may influence consumers in multiple ways, we contend that reduced self-perceived expertise is a crucial process through which rejected recommendations affect future product intentions.

Overview of studies

We test our theoretical framework across seven experiments. Study 1 consists of three experiments that test our proposed main effect and differentiate rejected recommendations from a social proof explanation. Next, Study 2 features two experiments that test the mediating role of self-perceived expertise and examine competing explanations. Study 3 replicates this mediating effect and tests the moderating role of psychological closeness. Finally, Study 4 leverages an in-person recommendation paradigm and consequential choice to test the moderating role of horizontal differentiation salience.

STUDY 1: DIFFERENTIATING REJECTED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SOCIAL PROOF

Study 1 consists of three experiments that test the effect of rejected recommendations on recommenders' future intentions toward the product. Importantly, these studies are designed to demonstrate that rejected recommendations affect recommender choice beyond what would be expected from consumers updating preferences when observing divergent choices (e.g., Argo, 2020; Dahl, 2013; White & Argo, 2011). Specifically, our theory suggests that the effects of rejected recommendations will emerge only when a recommendation is provided and a divergent choice by the recommendee (and not another consumer) is observed. Studies 1a and 1b test the first condition by comparing a rejected recommendation to learning of another's divergent choice in the absence of a recommendation. Study 1c tests the second condition by examining how providers of a recommendation respond when learning of a divergent choice by the recommendee versus another consumer to whom a recommendation was not provided.

Study 1a procedure

We propose that those who provide a recommendation will report reduced future intentions toward their recommended option upon learning the recommendee made a divergent choice. This effect should not emerge for those who learn of another's divergent choice without having first provided a recommendation or for those whose recommendees select the recommended option (i.e., recommenders who learn their recommendation was accepted).

Undergraduates ($n = 188$) completed a 2 (recommendation status: recommendation vs. no recommendation) × 2 (choice congruence: incongruent vs. congruent) between-participants experiment in exchange for course credit ($M_{age} = 20.2$ years; 54.8% female). This study was preregistered (https://osf.

io/eyn5a/?view_only=ba897f62e97141aeb687324e53528c4b). We present only our focal measures in the manuscript for brevity, but we note that this study was run earlier in the research program. Therefore, we collected a series of additional measures relating to attributions, potential processes, and evaluations of the recommendee. All measures and related analyses are provided in Appendix MDA A.

Upon entering the lab, participants sat at individual stations where they were presented with three pens of similar quality and a piece of paper. They were informed that they would get to select one pen to keep at the end of the session and were asked to evaluate each pen and indicate their favorite. After indicating their initial preference, participants learned they would be leaving the main lab to have a discussion with another student from a separate research group. In actuality, this other participant was a hypothesis-blind, female confederate. Prior to participants exiting the lab to enter the breakout room, the lab manager handed each one a colored sticky note that covertly indicated their pen choice to the confederate. This sticky note allowed the confederate to make a congruent or incongruent choice in the no recommendation condition.

Upon entering the breakout room, participants sat at a table with the confederate, who indicated that they had received instructions from the researchers about the conversation topic. In the recommendation condition, the confederate informed each participant that she was supposed to choose one pen out of three options. She had received basic information about the pens but was not able to physically test them. She then asked the participant which pen they would recommend. Providing a recommendation was not forced, yet all participants in the recommendation condition chose to do so. After receiving the recommendation, the confederate paused to consider the options and then communicated her final choice to the participant. For tracking purposes, the confederate assigned participants to a condition by alternating between congruent and incongruent. After disclosing her intended choice, the confederate indicated that the participant should go back to their original station in the lab (see Appendix MDA A for full scripts).

In the no recommendation condition, the confederate engaged the participant in a conversation about a different product category (business cards). The interaction was of similar length (1–2 min) and involved discussing product preferences; however, the confederate did not solicit a recommendation. At the end of the interaction, the confederate steered the conversation to the pen-selection task and indicated their own choice (either congruent or incongruent with the participant's choice, based on condition).

Upon returning to the lab, participants were reminded they would receive the pen of their choice. They then indicated their selection and received their pen. Future product intentions were operationalized as whether the recommendee switched between the initially selected option and their final choice (switched choice = 1, maintained choice = 0). Our framework predicted increased switching only when the confederate made an incongruent choice following a recommendation, whereas a social proof account would predict increased switching following an incongruent choice in both the recommendation and no recommendation conditions. After selecting their pen, participants completed additional measures and demographics (see Appendix MDA A).

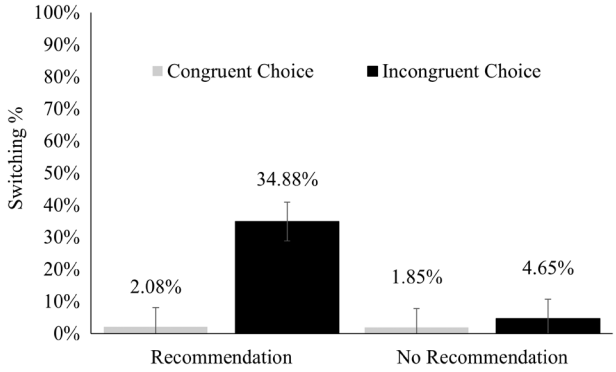

FIGURE 2 Study 1a results – the effect of another's congruent versus incongruent choice after recommending (vs. not recommending).

Study 1a results

We planned to conduct a logistic regression to test the interactive effect of choice congruence and recommendation status on pen choice. However, an initial analysis revealed low incidence of switching in three of the four experimental conditions ($n \leq 3$ per cell, 19 cases total). With two independent variables, we had 9.5 events per variable (EPV). This fell short of the minimum recommended EPV for logistic regression, which ranges from 10 (Peduzzi et al., 1996) to 20 (Feinstein, 1996), rendering a logistic regression an inappropriate test. As an alternative, Rosenthal and Rosnow (2008) suggest ANOVA as an appropriate approach, noting it can "generally give quite accurate results" for dichotomous data (p. 596). Thus, we followed our preregistered fallback analysis plan of coding each of the four unique conditions and conducting a one-way ANOVA of switching rates. This ANOVA resulted in a significant omnibus test ($F(3, 184) = 15.50$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2_p = 0.20$). We next examined the contrast between those in the recommendation/incongruent condition and the other three conditions (contrast coding: recommendation/incongruent = 3, recommendation/congruent = −1, no recommendation/incongruent = −1; no recommendation/congruent = −1, procedure per Buckless & Ravenscroft, 1990). Those in the recommendation/incongruent condition switched away from their recommended pen more often (15 of 43 switched;

$P = 34.88\%$, SD = 48.22%) than those in the other conditions (4 of 145 switched; $P = 2.76\%$, SD = 16.44%; $F(1, 186) = 46.62$, $p < 0.0001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.20$; see Figure 2). Pairwise contrasts revealed those in the recommendation/incongruent condition switched more often ($P = 34.88\%$) than those in the no recommendation/incongruent condition (2 of 43 switched; $P = 4.65\%$, SD = 21.31%; $F(1, 184) = 26.69$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$), the recommendation/congruent condition (1 of 48 switched; $P = 2.08\%$, SD = 14.43%; $F(1, 184) = 32.93$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.15$), and the no recommendation/congruent condition (1 of 54 switched; $P = 1.85\%$, SD = 13.61%; $F(1, 184) = 35.24$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$). Participants thus switched away from their initial choice more often after making a recommendation and learning their recommendation was rejected, compared not only to an accepted recommendation but also to learning of another's incongruent choice when no recommendation was made.

Study 1b procedure

Study 1b was designed to replicate Study 1a using a different recommendation interaction and product category. Undergraduates ($n = 174$) were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (recommendation status: recommendation vs. no recommendation) × 2 (choice congruence: incongruent vs. congruent) between-participants experiment ($M_{age} = 19.6$ years; 44.2% female).

Participants first viewed two 2-min virtual rollercoaster rides that were respectively labeled as from "Adventure Park" and "Thrill World." These virtual rides were curated from the same real theme park (identity disguised). The presentation order of the two experiences was randomized. After viewing the rides, participants in the recommendation condition read there was another group of participants completing the study, and they would be matched with a participant from this other research group for the remainder of the study (in actuality, there were no other students—participants instead engaged with pre-scripted communications). They read that this partner was being asked to choose between the same virtual rides the participant experienced, and they should provide a recommendation to help their partner make a choice. After reading this, participants selected the option they wanted to recommend. After recommending, participants spent 20 s viewing a waiting page while their partner ostensibly made their choice. When the page advanced, participants received a message indicating the partner's choice. In the congruent condition, the message indicated the partner accepted the recommendation (e.g., if the participant recommended Thrill World, the message read, "You recommended that I pick Thrill World. And, after looking at the choices I decided to pick Thrill World"). In the incongruent condition, the message indicated that the partner chose the experience from the park that was not recommended (i.e., they rejected the recommendation).

In the no recommendation condition, after viewing the two virtual rides, participants indicated which park they would prefer to visit. They then read that there was another group of participants completing the study who were also choosing between the two parks, and they had been paired with a member of this group. After viewing a 20-s waiting page, they received a message indicating the partner's choice. Those in the congruent condition read that their partner chose the same park as the participant (e.g., if the participant chose Thrill World, they read, "After looking at the choices, I decided to pick Thrill World"). Those in the incongruent condition read that their partner chose the other park (see Appendix MDA B for stimuli, including videos).

After all participants learned their partner's choice, they were told they would be experiencing a third virtual rollercoaster and were given the choice of whether this ride was from Adventure Park or Thrill World. Future product intentions were operationalized as the switching rate between the initially selected option and final choice (switched choice = 1, maintained choice = 0). This was a consequential choice, as participants consumed their selected option. All participants then experienced the third ride, after which they reported additional measures and demographics. See Appendix MDA B for these measures and their respective analyses.

Study 1b results

A logistic regression of participant theme park choice as a function of recommendation status, choice congruence, and their interaction revealed a marginal main effect of recommendation status ($b = -0.81$, SE = 0.45; $\chi^2_{Wald} = 3.25$, $p = 0.07$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$), a main effect of choice congruence ($b = -2.05$, SE = 0.57; $\chi^2_{Wald} = 12.95$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.07$), and the expected interaction ($b = 1.50$, SE = 0.75; $\chi^2_{Wald} = 4.07$, $p = 0.044$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). As predicted, those who provided a recommendation were more likely to switch from their initial choice after learning their partner made a choice that was incongruent with their recommendation (i.e., the recommendation was rejected; 21 of 41 switched; $P = 51.22\%$), compared to when the choice was congruent (i.e., the recommendation was accepted; 5 of 42 switched; $P = 11.90\%$; $\chi^2 = 14.91$, $p < 0.001$). Among those who did not recommend, switching rates were similar regardless of whether their partner's choice was incongruent (14 of 44 switched; $P = 31.82\%$) or congruent (10 of 47 switched; $P = 21.28\%$; $\chi^2 = 1.30$, $p = 0.34$) with their own. Further, a rejected recommendation led to marginally increased switching compared to learning of an incongruent choice without first recommending ($\chi^2 = 3.30$, $p = 0.06$). This again suggests that rejected recommendations affect future product intentions beyond what can be explained by a social proof account.

Study 1c procedure

Study 1c tests whether, after provided a recommendation, a recommender's future product intentions are more strongly influenced by observing the choice of the recommendee, compared to learning the choice of a different person. We suggest self-perceived expertise will be more strongly affected by an incongruent recommendee choice (a rejected recommendation) because this is more of an indictment of recommender expertise. Alternatively, a social proof account would predict similar effects regardless of whose choice the recommender observes.

Undergraduate students ($n=298$) were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (decision-maker: recommendee vs. other)×2 (choice congruence: incongruent vs. congruent) between-participants study in exchange for course credit. We deployed a simple attention check (e.g., "Please select 3") in all studies that feature imagined recommendation interactions. In all these studies, we excluded participants who failed the attention check. In this study, 56 participants were removed prior to data analysis for failing the attention check, resulting in a final sample of 242 participants ($M_{age}=22.7$ years; 52.7% female).

Participants completed a visualization exercise in which they imagined recently enjoying a hike on Saddle Ridge Trail. They then read that a few days after the hike, a friend asked for a recommendation on Facebook for a local hike. To aid in this visualization, participants viewed a Facebook post in which the poster used Facebook's "Recommendation" tool. Updated visuals were provided at each stage of the experiment (see Appendix MDA C). Participants then read that, because they enjoyed their hike, they decided to recommend Saddle Ridge Trail to their friend. On the next page, all participants read they were scrolling through Facebook a couple days later when they encountered another post, which served as our manipulation.

This post was shared by either the recommendee (recommendee condition) or by another friend (other condition), who indicated they enjoyed a hike on either Saddle Ridge Trail (congruent) or Jefferson Point Trail (incongruent). Future product intention was operationalized by measuring participants' intent to revisit Saddle Ridge Trail (1=*not at all likely*; 7=*extremely likely*). Participants completed other measures, none of which affected our results (see Appendix MDA C).

Study 1c results

We conducted a two-way ANOVA of product intentions as a function of the decision-maker and choice congruence conditions. This revealed neither a main effect of the congruence ($F(1, 238)=0.93$, $p=0.34$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$) nor decision-maker ($F(1, 238)=0.34$, $p=0.56$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$) conditions. Importantly, the expected interaction emerged ($F(1, 238)=4.25$, $p=0.040$; $\eta_p^2=0.02$). As predicted, learning another's choice was incongruent with the recommended option reduced the recommender's product intentions when the decision-maker was the recommendee (i.e., the recommendation was rejected; $M_{Incongruent}=5.66$, SD=1.60; $M_{Congruent}=6.15$, SD=1.01; $F(1, 238)=4.51$, $p=0.035$; $\eta_p^2=0.02$). However, when the decision-maker was a different friend, an incongruent choice did not significantly affect product intentions ($M_{Incongruent}=6.08$, SD=0.99; $M_{Congruent}=5.91$, SD=1.37; $F(1, 238)=0.61$, $p=0.44$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$). Thus, recommender likelihood to revisit the trail was more strongly affected by a rejected recommendation compared to recommending and then learning of another's (a non-recommendee's) choice.

Study 1 discussion

Across three experiments, Study 1 demonstrates that rejected recommendations reduce recommenders' future product intentions. Importantly, this effect is distinct from those observed in prior social influence research. Studies 1a and 1b find that learning of another's divergent choice has a stronger effect when the consumer makes a recommendation, as opposed to when no recommendation was made. Study 1c then demonstrates that, among those who have recommended, future product intentions are more strongly affected when the recommender learns of a divergent choice made by the recommendee, as opposed to a divergent choice made by another consumer. Together, these findings provide evidence that rejected recommendations not only have a negative effect on recommenders' future product intentions but also represent a form of social influence that renders recommenders more sensitive to the recommendee's choice. These studies replicate our focal main effect across different product categories using both in-person and visualization-based experimental designs. We note one limitation of Study 1c: while all participants were imagining viewing posts from Facebook "friends," the scenario wording may have unintentionally prompted participants in the two conditions to imagine targets of different closeness (see Appendix MDA C for stimuli). To address this potential limitation, we explicitly account for closeness in subsequent studies both via measurement and manipulation.

STUDY 2: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SELF-PERCEIVED EXPERTISE

Study 2 features two experiments that employ measured mediation to test the process through which rejected recommendations reduce future product intentions. We predict rejected recommendations lead recommenders to question their own expertise, which reduces their

intentions toward the recommended product. Study 2 also tests whether these effects can be explained by differing perceptions of product quality or social judgments of the recommendee.

Study 2a procedure

Prolific participants ($n=300$) were randomly assigned to conditions (rejected vs. accepted recommendation) in a between-participants design in exchange for compensation. Three participants failed an attention check, resulting in a final sample of 297 ($M_{age}=35.8$ years, 43.4% female). We preregistered our design, sample size justification, analysis plan, and materials (https://osf.io/r95sp/?view_only=6bf37e79278549beb9962e3d15929aa5).

To begin, participants were asked to imagine a scenario in which someone asked them for a recommendation for a pair of headphones. Participants were asked to think of someone they knew who might ask them for such a recommendation. They reported the first name of their selected person (open-ended response) and indicated how close a relationship they had with that person (1=*not at all close*; 7=*very close*; $M=5.96$, SD=1.21). Closeness did not differ between conditions ($M_{Rejected}=5.99$, SD=1.27; $M_{Accepted}=5.92$, SD=1.16; $F(1, 295)=0.26$, $p=0.67$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$), and participants generally selected a close contact ($M=5.96$ was significantly higher than the scale midpoint of 4; one-sample t-test $(296)=27.76$, $p<0.001$; $\eta_p^2=0.72$).

Next, participants imagined having a conversation with the person they identified. During this conversation, this person indicated they were looking for a pair of over-the-ear noise-canceling headphones and asked the participant if there was a brand they would recommend. All participants read that they had a pair of headphones they liked, and they recommended the person purchase the same brand (see Appendix MDA D for full stimuli). Participants then imagined that they ran into the same person a week later and asked if they had purchased headphones. Those in the rejected (accepted) recommendation condition learned that this person purchased a brand that was different than (the same as) the recommended brand.

After learning whether their recommendation was rejected or accepted, participants reported future product intentions, operationalized as repurchase intentions: "If you were to purchase a new pair of headphones, which brand of headphones would you be most likely to purchase?" (1=*a different brand from the one you recommended*; 7=*the same brand you recommended*). Participants then reported self-perceived expertise using the expertise subscale of the source credibility scale (adapted to measure self-perceptions; Ohanian, 1990). The measure read, "Having learned about this person's product choice, how would you perceive yourself on the following dimensions at this moment?" (7-point bipolar items anchored by *unskilled/skilled*, *unknowledgeable/knowledgeable*, *inexperienced/experienced*, *unqualified/qualified*, *not an expert/expert*; $\alpha=0.93$). To assess alternative processes, participants reported perceived product quality ("When thinking about the brand of headphones you originally recommended, how would you rate the objective quality of that brand compared to other noise-cancelling headphones?"; 9-point scale, anchored by *very low/high in quality compared to other options*) and the extent to which they were offended (7-point Likert items: "I was insulted"; "I was hurt"; "I felt like the other person did not show respect"; "I was embarrassed"; "I had my honor hurt"; "I was humiliated"; $\alpha=0.96$; Harinck et al., 2013). Finally, participants provided demographics.

Study 2a results

Future product intentions

A one-way ANOVA of product intentions revealed a significant effect of a rejected recommendation ($F(1, 295)=53.02$, $p<0.001$; $\eta_p^2=0.15$). Replicating the results of Study 1, participants who learned their recommendation was rejected ($M=5.29$, SD=1.33) reported lower intentions to repurchase the recommended brand compared to those who learned their recommendation was accepted ($M=6.26$, SD=0.95).

Mediation via self-perceived expertise

We next tested the mediating effect of self-perceived expertise. First, an ANOVA confirmed that those who learned their recommendation was rejected perceived themselves as having less expertise ($M_{Rejected}=3.20$, SD=1.15; $M_{Accepted}=3.95$, SD=1.04; $F(1, 295)=34.46$, $p<0.001$; $\eta_p^2=0.11$). We then conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; model 4; 10,000 bootstrapped samples) with the recommendation condition as the independent variable (accepted=−1, rejected=1), product intentions as the dependent variable, and self-perceived expertise as the mediator. As expected, there was a significant indirect effect of a rejected recommendation on product intentions, through self-perceived expertise ($b=-0.12$, SE=0.03, 95% CI [−0.19, −0.06]). A rejected recommendation decreased self-perceived expertise ($b=-0.37$, SE=0.06, $t(295)=5.87$, $p<0.0001$), which in turn reduced product intentions ($b=0.32$, SE=0.06, $t(294)=5.42$, $p<0.0001$).

Potential alternative accounts

We next examined the effect of rejected recommendations on perceptions of product quality and the extent to which recommenders felt offended. A one-way ANOVA

of perceived product quality as a function of rejected (vs. accepted) recommendations was significant ($F(1, 295) = 7.74$, $p = 0.006$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$), as a rejected recommendation led recommenders to perceive the product as being lower in quality ($M = 6.92$, SD = 1.30) compared to an accepted recommendation ($M = 7.32$, SD = 1.21). A one-way ANOVA of offense was also significant ($F(1, 295) = 32.75$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$), as those whose recommendations were rejected felt more offended ($M = 1.98$, SD = 1.14) compared to those whose recommendations were accepted ($M = 1.32$, SD = 0.84).

To test whether self-perceived expertise predicted future product intentions beyond product quality- and recommendee-related inferences, we conducted a mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; model 4; 10,000 bootstrapped samples) with the manipulated condition as the independent variable (accepted = −1, rejected = 1), product intentions as the dependent variable, and three mediators in parallel: self-perceived expertise, product quality, and offense. We continued to observe a significant indirect effect through self-perceived expertise ($b = -0.08$, SE = 0.03, 95% CI [−0.15, −0.03]), where a rejected recommendation decreased self-perceived expertise ($b = -0.37$, SE = 0.06, $t(295) = 5.87$, $p < 0.0001$), which reduced product intentions ($b = 0.22$, SE = 0.06, $t(292) = 3.55$, $p < 0.001$). There was also an indirect effect of perceived product quality ($b = -0.05$ SE = 0.02, 95% CI [−0.09, −0.01]), whereby rejected recommendations decreased perceptions of product quality ($b = -0.20$, SE = 0.07, $t(295) = 2.78$, $p = 0.006$), which in turn reduced product intentions ($b = 0.22$, SE = 0.05, $t(292) = 4.16$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, there was no indirect effect through offense ($b = -0.02$, SE = 0.02, 95% CI [−0.07, 0.02]; see Figure 3). We also conducted a pairwise contrast to compare the relative strength of these indirect effects. This analysis did not reveal significant differences between the indirect effects through self-perceived expertise and perceived product quality (pairwise contrast: $b = -0.07$, SE = 0.08, 95% CI [−0.23, 0.08]). This suggests that the effect of rejected recommendations on subsequent product intentions operates equally through reduced recommender perceptions of their own expertise and of the product's quality (in Appendix MDA D, we report a main effect mediation model with product quality and offense as covariates that also supports our findings).

Study 2b procedure

Study 2b employed the same procedure as Study 2a using a different product category to demonstrate the generalizability of our effects. Prolific participants ($n = 302$) read about recommending a travel mug to a friend and then learned whether their recommendation was accepted or rejected. Prior to the scenario, participants identified a specific other and reported their closeness to this person. Closeness did not differ between conditions ($M_{Rejected} = 5.83$, SD = 1.23; $M_{Accepted} = 5.89$, SD = 1.23; $F(1, 299) = 0.20$, $p = 0.65$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$), and participants generally selected a close contact ($M = 5.96$ was higher than the midpoint; one-sample t-test(298) = 26.16, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.70$). After learning of an accepted or rejected recommendation, participants reported repurchase intentions, self-perceived expertise ($\alpha = 0.94$), perceived product quality, and feelings of offense ($\alpha = 0.96$). All measures were the same as in Study 2a. Three participants failed an attention check, leaving a sample of 299 participants ($M_{age} = 35.5$ years, 44.5% female). We preregistered our design, sample size justification, analysis plan, and materials (details can be found at https://osf.io/5cnyb/?view_only=deef81b2f69b4686a15f50b090f7a23f).

Study 2b results

Future product intentions

A one-way ANOVA of product intentions revealed a significant effect of rejected recommendations ($F(1, 297) = 89.03$, $p < 0.0001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.23$). Replicating the results of Study 2a, those who learned their recommendation was rejected ($M = 5.09$, SD = 1.46) reported lower intentions toward the recommended product compared to those who learned their recommendation was accepted ($M = 6.39$, SD = 0.84).

Mediation via self-perceived expertise

As in Study 2a, participants who learned their recommendation was rejected perceived themselves as having lower expertise ($M_{Rejected} = 4.17$, SD = 1.14; $M_{Accepted} = 5.12$, SD = 1.01; $F(1, 297) = 57.87$, $p < 0.0001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.16$). A mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect through self-perceived expertise ($b = -0.22$, SE = 0.04, 95% CI [−0.32, −0.14]), as a rejected recommendation led to decreased self-perceived expertise ($b = -0.48$, SE = 0.06, $t(297) = 7.61$, $p < 0.0001$), which in turn reduced product intentions ($b = 0.47$, SE = 0.06, $t(296) = 8.09$, $p < 0.0001$).

Potential alternative accounts

As in Study 2a, a rejected recommendation also led recommenders to perceive the product as being lower in quality ($M_{Rejected} = 6.81$, SD = 1.26; $M_{Accepted} = 7.35$, SD = 1.04; $F(1, 297) = 16.51$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$) and elicited greater feelings of offense ($M_{Rejected} = 1.78$, SD = 1.06; $M_{Accepted} = 1.13$, SD = 0.46; $F(1, 297) = 46.88$, $p < 0.0001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.14$). When all three mediators were tested in a parallel mediation model, we observed an indirect effect through self-perceived expertise ($b = -0.18$, SE = 0.04, 95% CI [−0.27, −0.10]) and an indirect effect through product quality ($b = -0.06$, SE = 0.02, 95% CI [−0.11, −0.02]). No effect through offense was observed ($b = 0.04$, SE = 0.03,

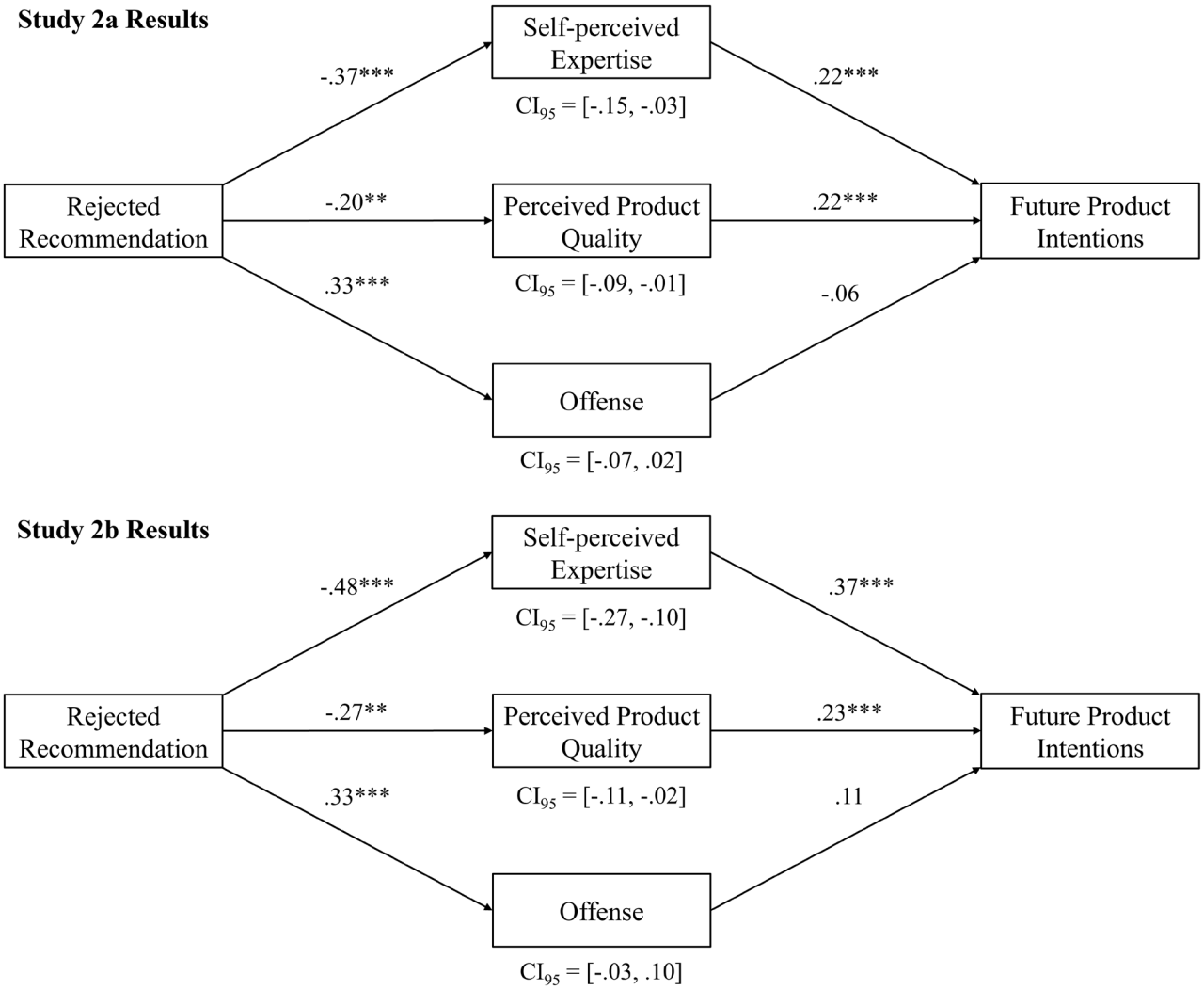

FIGURE 3 Study 2a and 2b parallel mediation results.

95% CI [−0.03, 0.10]). As in Study 2a, we conducted pairwise contrasts to examine the relative strength of the indirect effects. This analysis revealed that the indirect effect through self-perceived expertise was significantly stronger than the indirect effect through perceived product quality (pairwise contrast: $b = -0.23$, SE = 0.10, 95% CI [−0.44, −0.03]). Combined with the results of Study 2a, this finding suggests that self-perceived expertise is at least as influential, if not more so, than perceptions of product quality in explaining the effect of rejected recommendations on future product intentions.

Discussion

Across two experiments, Study 2 provides evidence that the negative effect of rejected recommendations is indeed mediated by recommenders' self-perceived expertise. Future product intentions are also partially mediated by recommenders' perceptions of product quality, suggesting that rejected recommendations lead recommenders to question not only their own expertise but also the objective quality of the product. This path aligns with an informational social influence account, wherein observing a divergent choice led recommenders to negatively update their product-related perceptions (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975). Observing multiple indirect effects is not entirely surprising, given that many outcomes are multiply determined and often involve a series of cognitions. Additionally, while prior research highlights the interpersonal consequences of rejected advice (Blunden et al., 2019), feelings of offense did not mediate the effect of rejected recommendations on future product intentions.

As a final point, while not a central goal of Study 2, our measure of psychological closeness empirically supported our supposition that recommendations are generally provided to close others in established relationships (mean closeness values nearing 6 out of 7 in both studies). As outlined in our preregistration, observing similarly high levels of closeness between the accept and reject conditions allowed us to rule out differing levels

of closeness as an alternative explanation for our effects. As this construct is present in our theoretical model, we explored moderation by closeness for completeness. The restricted range of closeness, however, prevented observation of significant moderation (reported in Appendix MDA D and E, respectively). In Study 3, we manipulate closeness to provide a stronger test of our hypothesized moderation.

STUDY 3: THE MODERATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CLOSENESS

Study 2 provided support for our proposed underlying process of self-perceived expertise. Study 3 seeks to build on these findings by testing the moderating role of psychological closeness (Aron & Aron, 1986). We propose consumer responses to rejected recommendations will be strongest when the recommender has a close relationship with the recommendee. Study 3 also seeks to provide additional evidence of the mediating role of self-perceived expertise. We preregistered our design, sample size justification, analysis plan, and materials (details can be found here: https://osf.io/bt2hp/?view_only=3809f45da99f432794e6ca5840ff4aa7).

Procedure

Participants from Prolific ($n=1206$) were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (rejected vs. accepted recommendation) × 2 (close vs. distant psychological closeness) between-participants experiment for financial compensation. Forty-seven participants failed an attention check, resulting in a final sample of 1159 ($M_{age}=38.5$ years, 45.6% female).

To begin the study, participants completed a psychological closeness manipulation in which they were asked to think about either someone close to them such as a family member or very close friend or an acquaintance such as someone they met through an informal social group (McCullough et al., 1997). Participants indicated the first name of their identified person, the nature of their relationship, and their closeness with this person (1 = *not at all close*; 7 = *extremely close*). Participants then undertook the same visualization exercise as in Study 2a, in which they recommended a pair of headphones. The only difference between this procedure and that used in Study 2a was that this scenario specifically referenced the previously identified person (i.e., "Imagine you were talking with the person you identified at the beginning of the study…"; see Appendix MDA F for full stimuli).

Upon completing this exercise, participants indicated future product intentions (operationalized as intentions to repurchase the recommended brand; 7-point bipolar scale), self-perceived expertise ($\alpha=0.93$), and demographics (same measures as Study 2a; see Appendix MDA F).

Results

Manipulation check

A two-way ANOVA of the psychological closeness measure as a function of the rejected recommendation and closeness manipulations revealed only a main effect of the closeness manipulation ($M_{Close}=6.51$, SD = 0.65; $M_{Distant}=1.87$, SD = 0.67; $F(1, 1155)=14315.8$, $p<0.0001$; $\eta_p^2=0.93$). There was no main effect of the recommendation condition ($F(1, 1155)=0.29$, $p=0.59$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$) nor a significant interaction ($F(1, 1155)=2.53$, $p=0.11$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$), indicating the manipulation was effective.

Future product intentions

We conducted a two-way ANOVA of future product intentions as a function of the rejected recommendation and closeness manipulations. This analysis revealed a significant main effect of the rejected recommendation condition ($F(1, 1155)=153.48$, $p<0.0001$; $\eta_p^2=0.12$), but no main effect of the closeness condition ($F(1, 1155)=1.64$, $p=0.20$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$). Importantly, these effects were qualified by the expected interaction ($F(1, 1155)=34.86$, $p<0.0001$; $\eta_p^2=0.03$). As predicted by our framework, the effect of a rejected recommendation on future product intentions was stronger for a close recommendee ($M_{Rejected}=5.00$, SD = 1.71; $M_{Accepted}=6.41$, SD = 0.81; ($F(1, 1155)=167.72$, $p<0.0001$; $\eta_p^2=0.13$) than a more distant recommendee ($M_{Rejected}=5.55$, SD = 1.43; $M_{Accepted}=6.05$, SD = 1.14; ($F(1, 1155)=20.98$, $p<0.001$; $\eta_p^2=0.02$; see Figure 4).

To empirically verify the difference in magnitude of the simple effect within the close and distant other conditions, we estimated a regression to calculate raw regression weights for the effect of accept versus reject within each distance condition. The 95% confidence intervals surrounding these effects did not overlap, indicating the effect of a rejected recommendation in the close other condition ($b=-0.70$, SE = 0.05, 95% CI [−0.81; −0.60]) was significantly larger than in the distant other condition ($b=-0.25$, SE = 0.06, 95% CI [−0.36; −0.14]). We further confirmed this magnitude difference using a procedure outlined by Clogg et al. (1995) to compare the magnitude of raw regression weights. This test revealed the effect in the close other condition was significantly larger than that in the distant other condition ($Z=5.90$, $p<0.0001$).

Mediation via self-perceived expertise

A two-way ANOVA of self-perceived expertise as a function of the recommendation and closeness conditions revealed a main effect of rejected recommendations ($F(1, 1155)=102.94$, $p<0.0001$; $\eta_p^2=0.08$), no main effect of closeness ($F(1, 1155)=0.94$, $p=0.33$; $\eta_p^2=0.00$),

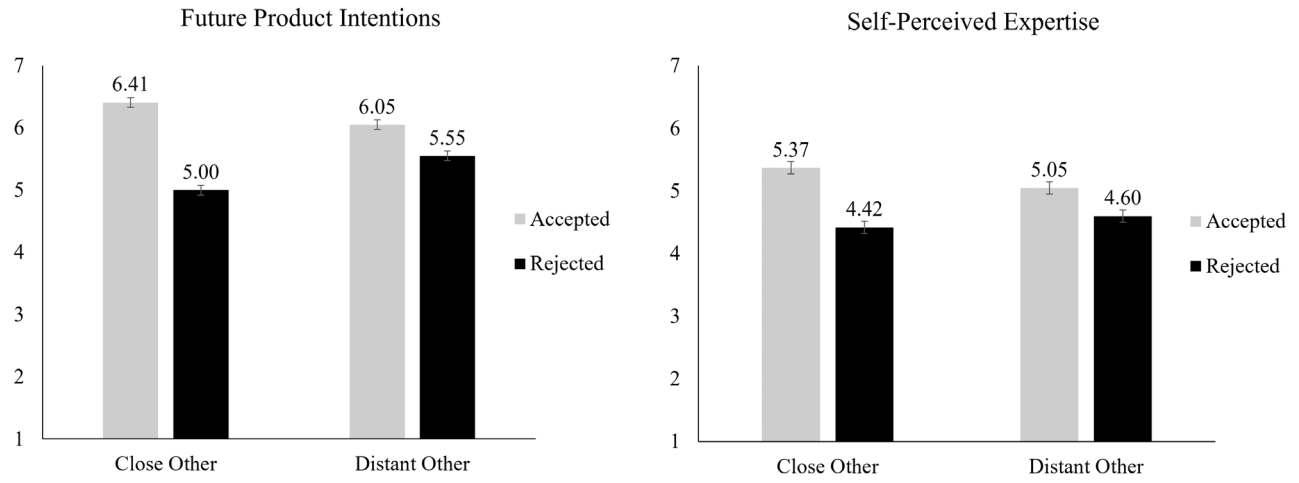

FIGURE 4 Study 3 results – the effect of rejected recommendations and psychological closeness on recommender product intentions and self-perceived expertise.

and the expected interaction ($F(1, 1155) = 13.20$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$). Replicating the pattern observed on the dependent measure, a rejected recommendation led recommenders to perceive themselves as having less expertise both when the recommendee was a closer ($M_{Rejected} = 4.42$, SD = 1.35; $M_{Accepted} = 5.37$, SD = 0.98; $F(1, 1155) = 95.15$, $p < 0.0001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.08$) and a more distant other ($M_{Rejected} = 4.60$, SD = 1.28; $M_{Accepted} = 5.05$, SD = 1.06; $F(1, 1155) = 21.16$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$), with the effect stronger in the close condition (see Figure 4). To compare magnitudes of the simple effect within the close versus distant conditions, we used the same approach as outlined for product intentions. This analysis revealed no overlap in regression weight confidence intervals, indicating the effect of a rejected recommendation on self-perceived expertise was larger in the close other condition ($b = -0.48$, SE = 0.05, 95% CI [−0.57; −0.38]) than in the distant other condition ($b = -0.23$, SE = 0.05, 95% CI [−0.32; −0.13]). A direct comparison also revealed that the effect in the close other condition was significantly larger than in the distant other condition ($Z = 3.63$, $p < 0.001$; Clogg et al., 1995).

We next conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Hayes, 2017; model 8, 10,000 bootstrapped samples) with the recommendation condition as the independent variable (accepted = −1; rejected = 1), product intentions as the dependent variable, self-perceived expertise as the mediator, and psychological closeness (distant = −1; close = 1) as the moderator. We observed a significant indirect effect of the interaction effect through self-perceived expertise (index of moderated mediation: $b = -0.10$, SE = 0.03, 95% CI [−0.16, −0.04]). Probing revealed a significant indirect effect of rejected recommendations on product intentions through expertise within both the close ($b = -0.12$, SE = 0.03, 95% CI [−0.25, −0.14]) and distant other ($b = -0.09$, SE = 0.02, 95% CI [−0.13, −0.05]) conditions. A contrast analysis revealed that the indirect effect in the close other condition was significantly larger than in the distant other condition ($\Delta_{indirect\ effects} = -0.19$, SE = 0.10, 95% CI [−0.16, −0.04]).

Discussion

The results of Study 3 again provide evidence that rejected recommendations reduce recommenders' future intentions toward the recommended product by reducing their self-perceived expertise. This study builds on our earlier studies by demonstrating the moderating role of psychological closeness, with consumers' self-perceived expertise and product intentions more strongly affected by a rejected recommendation from a close other. Interestingly, while the negative effect of rejected recommendations on product intentions was weaker when the recommendee was a more distant other, it remained significant. This demonstrates that rejected recommendations, while being most impactful coming from close others, nevertheless influence recommenders' future product intentions even when coming from someone more distant.

STUDY 4: THE MODERATING ROLE OF HORIZONTAL DIFFERENTIATION SALIENCE

Our theory proposes rejected recommendations reduce product intentions as a function of reduced self-perceived expertise. If a recommender can attribute rejection to the recommendee choosing based on idiosyncratic preferences, this should reduce the extent to which a rejected recommendation is seen as reflective of one's expertise. Study 4 thus tests the moderating role of horizontal differentiation salience on responses to rejected recommendations. We propose that the effect of a rejected recommendation will be mitigated when the

potential for the product to be horizontally differentiated from alternatives is more salient. Study 4 tests this moderating effect using a face-to-face recommendation interaction and consequential product choice.

Procedure

Undergraduate students ($n = 163$) completed the study for course credit ($M_{age} = 21.0$ years; 44.8% female). They were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (rejected vs. accepted recommendation) × 2 (vertical vs. horizontal differentiation) between-participants experiment.

The procedure was similar to that of Study 1a. Participants were seated at individual stations in the lab, where they were presented with three pens of similar quality and a piece of paper. Differentiation salience was manipulated prior to participants evaluating the pens (manipulations adapted from Spiller & Belogolova, 2017). Participants in the vertical differentiation condition read that the three pens were made with materials of varying quality, resulting in some pens being objectively better than others on dimensions like writing comfort and ink flow. These participants were directed to select the highest-quality pen. Those in the horizontal condition read that the pens were made with materials of similar quality, meaning observed differences between them were the result of personal preferences for attributes like writing comfort and ink flow. Participants were then directed to select the pen they liked most, based on their preferences (see Appendix MDA G). They tried each pen and indicated their initial choice.

Next, participants learned they would be discussing their pen choice with a student from a separate research group. This other student was a hypothesis-blind, male confederate, purportedly with the same major as participants to maximize perceived similarity (Kristofferson et al., 2018). Participants individually interacted with the confederate in a separate breakout room. When the participant entered the room, the confederate informed them that he had received basic information about the pens but was not allowed to test them. The confederate then asked the participant for a recommendation. After participants made a recommendation, the confederate took a moment to consider the recommendation and then communicated his choice.

The confederate assigned participants to conditions by flipping a coin prior to each interaction. In the rejected condition, the confederate indicated that he planned to select a pen other than the recommended option (alternative choice was randomized between the two non-recommended options; see Appendix MDA G for script). In the accepted condition, the confederate indicated that he planned to select the recommended option. In contrast to Study 1a, the confederate was trained not to use words like "best" or "prefer" to avoid confounding the differentiation manipulation. After this interaction, participants returned to the lab where they chose a pen to take with them at the conclusion of the study. Future product intentions were operationalized as the comparison between participants' recommended product (i.e., initial choice) and final choice (switched choice = 1, maintained choice = 0).

To close, participants completed a differentiation salience manipulation check, which asked them to identify the primary difference between the pens on a 7-point, bipolar scale, with anchors as follows: 1 = *the pens differed on objective dimensions of quality (*i.e., *the pen I chose was of better quality than the others)*; 7 = *the pens differed on dimensions of taste (*i.e., *the pen I chose suited my preferences better than the others*). They also reported additional measures and demographics (see Appendix MDA G for full measures and results).

Results

Manipulation check

A 2 × 2 ANOVA of the differentiation salience manipulation check revealed only a main effect of the differentiation condition ($F(1, 159) = 4.25$, $p = 0.041$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.03$), wherein those in the horizontal condition reported that the pens differed more on taste-based dimensions ($M = 4.81$, SD = 1.94) than did those in the vertical condition ($M = 4.15$, SD = 2.16). There was neither a main effect of rejected recommendations ($F(1, 159) = 1.57$, $p = 0.21$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.01$) nor an interaction ($F(1, 159) = 0.01$, $p = 0.93$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.00$).

Future product intentions

We planned to conduct a logistic regression to test the interactive effect of rejected recommendations and product differentiation on product intentions. However, as in Study 1a, an initial analysis revealed low incidence of switching behavior in three of the four experimental conditions ($n \leq 3$ per cell, 16 total cases of switching). With two independent variables, we had eight EPV, which again fell short of the minimum recommended EPV (Feinstein, 1996; Peduzzi et al., 1996), rendering logistic regression an inappropriate test. Thus, as in Study 1a, we compared mean switching rates among the four conditions using ANOVA (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2008). Our a priori hypothesis was that participants would be most likely to switch when their recommendation was rejected and when vertical (vs. horizontal) aspects of differentiation were made more salient. Thus, we examined the contrast between participants in the rejected/vertical condition versus those in the other three cells (contrast coding: rejected/vertical = 3, rejected/horizontal = −1, accepted/vertical = −1, accepted/horizontal = −1; procedure per

Buckless & Ravenscroft, 1990). This analysis revealed that those in the rejected/vertical condition switched more often (10 of 40 switched; $P = 25.00\%$, SD = 43.85%) than participants in the other three conditions (6 of 123 switched; $P = 4.88\%$, SD = 21.63%; $F(1, 161) = 14.89$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$). We next conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare switching rates among all four conditions, which resulted in a significant omnibus test ($F(3, 159) = 5.64$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.10$). Follow-up contrasts revealed that those in the rejected/vertical condition switched their pen choice more often ($P = 25.00\%$) than those in the rejected/horizontal condition (3 of 37 switched; $P = 8.11\%$, SD = 27.67%; $F(1, 159) = 6.69$, $p = 0.011$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$), suggesting that salience of horizontal differentiation does indeed mitigate the rejected recommendation effect. Those in the rejected/vertical condition also switched their pen choice more often than those in the accepted/vertical (3 of 42 switched; $P = 7.14\%$, SD = 26.07%; $F(1, 159) = 7.96$, $p = 0.005$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$) and accepted/horizontal (0 of 44 switched; $P = 0.00\%$, SD = 0.00%; $F(1, 159) = 15.96$, $p < 0.001$; $\eta_p^2 = 0.09$) conditions.

Discussion

Using a real recommendation interaction and consequential choice, Study 4 replicates the negative effect of rejected recommendations on recommenders' future product intentions. Importantly, however, this effect is mitigated when the potential for the recommended product to be horizontally differentiated from alternatives is made more salient. This finding is consistent with our theorizing that when the potential for the product to be horizontally differentiated is made explicitly salient, the recommendee's divergent choice can be more easily attributed to the recommendee's idiosyncratic preferences and is thus less likely to lead the recommender to reassess their expertise. In Appendix MDA H, we report a post-test that explores general perceptions of vertical and horizontal differentiation within each product category tested across our studies.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

By examining a novel WOM phenomenon—rejected recommendations—the present research highlights how the behaviors of WOM recipients affect the subsequent choices of WOM sharers. Specifically, we demonstrate that learning one's recommendation was rejected (i.e., learning the recommendee's choice was not congruent with the recommended option) negatively affects the recommender's future intentions toward the recommended product. These future product intentions include repurchase intentions (Studies 2a, 2b, and 3), product choice (Studies 1a, 1b, and 4), and revisit intentions (Study 1c). The effect of a rejected recommendation emerges despite prior WOM research suggesting that positive WOM sharers' product attitudes should be relatively resilient, even upon discovering negative information about the product (Brannon & Samper, 2018). Notably, the consequences of rejected recommendations are stronger than would be predicted by a social proof account (Cialdini, 1984). This highlights how recommendation interactions amplify the effects of observing others' choices on consumer behavior.

We also identify the process underlying this effect. Rejected recommendations lead recommenders to perceive themselves as having less expertise related to the focal product, which in turn reduces their future intentions toward the recommended product. We demonstrate evidence supporting this process using both measurement of self-perceived expertise (Studies 2a, 2b, and 3) and manipulation of theoretically derived moderators: psychological closeness (Study 3) and horizontal differentiation salience (Study 4). We also provide support for our theoretical framework across multiple product categories and recommendation interactions, including face-to-face (Studies 1a and 4), online (Study 1b), and scenario (Studies 1c, 2a, 2b, and 3) paradigms.

Theoretical contributions

The central theoretical contribution of this research is the identification and exploration of rejected recommendations as a novel phenomenon in the WOM domain. While extensive WOM research focuses on how a WOM sharer can influence a WOM recipient (e.g., Brown & Reingen, 1987; Duhan et al., 1997), a rejected recommendation is a phenomenon through which a WOM recipient can influence a WOM sharer. We thus contribute to a nascent stream of research considering post-WOM outcomes for WOM sharers. Prior research in this space focuses on how the sharer's *own* actions while sharing WOM affect their post-WOM perceptions (e.g., Chawdhary & Dall'Olmo Riley, 2015; Moore, 2012; Yeomans, 2019). We demonstrate that the actions of a WOM *recipient* can also affect the post-WOM perceptions of a WOM sharer.

We further contribute to literature on how social interactions in the WOM environment affect consumer outcomes. Prior research demonstrates that the perceptions of WOM sharers can be influenced upon learning detailed information about the experience others have had with the same product (in the case of negative initial perceptions; Brannon & Samper, 2018). We extend this work by showing that WOM sharers' purchase behaviors can shift with substantially less information about others' experiences (i.e., when they recommend and simply learn of the recommendee's choice). Notably, this occurs not only due to recommender perceptions of the product or its performance

but also due to recommender perceptions of their own product-related expertise. By highlighting this finding, we demonstrate a novel application for source credibility theory in the WOM domain. Previous research suggests that the extent to which WOM is incorporated into decision-making is driven by the recipient's perceptions of the WOM sharer's credibility (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). We add to this work by showing how WOM sharers use the choices of WOM recipients to update their own perceived credibility as a WOM source.

This research also contributes to the social influence literature. Prior marketing research on social influence has largely focused on how consumers are affected by making choices in the presence of others (e.g., Argo et al., 2005; White & Argo, 2011) and how learning of others' divergent choices affects behavior by exerting informational (e.g., Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975) or normative (e.g., Sanders & Baron, 1977) influence. We augment this line of study by identifying a novel form of social influence: rejected recommendations elicit effects on recommenders that exceed those of simply observing divergent choices. Specifically, rejected recommendations affect future product intentions because recommenders question their expertise related to the focal product. Thus, rejected recommendations not only represent a social influence phenomenon wherein the behavior of the recommendee has an outsized effect on recommender choice, but this effect is driven by negative self-inferences, as opposed to informational or normative social influence processes.

Implications for consumers

Consumers are often motivated to offer recommendations to be helpful (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), manage social impressions (Packard & Wooten, 2013), or participate in social conversations (Sheldon et al., 2011). They may not realize, however, that providing such recommendations can come at a personal or social cost. For example, if a consumer recommends a product to a friend and then learns the friend did not purchase the recommended option, this is likely to undermine the recommender's confidence in him- or herself as a competent consumer (i.e., reduce self-perceived expertise). Reduced confidence can lead to suboptimal future choices (van den Berg et al., 2016). Indeed, when consumers provide a recommendation, they often (though not always) recommend an option they themselves enjoyed. Because rejected recommendations can reduce recommender intentions toward the recommended option, recommenders may shift away from what was otherwise the optimal choice for them—a behavior that could result in post-purchase regret or dissatisfaction (Mittelstaedt et al., 2009). While external to our model, we also find that rejected recommendations affect recommenders' social evaluations of recommendees, which may undermine their social relationships.

Our findings thus suggest that consumers may want to be more selective when providing recommendations. For example, consumers might be protected from these negative outcomes by recommending to those to whom they feel less close (Study 3) or by recommending products that they perceive to be more horizontally differentiated (Study 4). Doing so should ameliorate the detrimental outcomes associated with a rejected recommendation. Alternatively, consumers could avoid seeking information related to recommendee choice altogether.

Limitations and future directions

The present research is not without limitations. First, though we focus on dyadic recommendations, many recommendations are provided in group settings like public online forums and group chats. Future research should explore how a recommendation's social setting might affect responses to rejected recommendations. Second, we highlight two moderators of our focal effects, yet other important boundary conditions may exist. For example, objective product expertise might mitigate these effects by reducing the likelihood that recommenders attribute the recommendee's choice to their own lack of expertise. Third, prior research in management shows that psychological closeness can reduce harmful behaviors in group conflict (Rispens et al., 2011). Thus, research could explore whether conditions exist in which increased closeness may buffer instead of exacerbate the negative effects of rejected recommendations. Fourth, we investigate the effect of rejected recommendations following positive recommendations. However, recommenders might suggest others *avoid* a product. A rejected recommendation in response to negative WOM (i.e., a recommendee purchases a product a recommender suggested they avoid) could elicit distinct patterns of behavior from the phenomenon studied herein. Fifth, in Studies 2a and 2b, we find that both self-perceived expertise and perceived product quality simultaneously mediate our effects. However, the relative strengths of these two processes differed between each study. It is thus possible that additional moderating conditions exist under which one or the other process exerts a stronger influence on product intentions. We leave this exploration to future research. Last, while we show that rejected recommendations can threaten or reduce self-perceived expertise, future research might consider the exact nature of this reduction. Expertise ratings reflect one's degree of knowledge relative to the sum total knowledge in the domain. Future research might explore whether a rejected recommendation results in

a consumer downgrading his or her knowledge relative to a constant total versus keeping one's own knowledge rating consistent but increasing the sum total.

In summary, the present research demonstrates a novel phenomenon and potentially adverse outcome that can emerge when consumers recommend products to others. We outline a conceptual framework to understand how rejected recommendations affect recommenders' future intentions toward the recommended product and demonstrate the unique effect of rejected recommendations over and above the effects observed in prior social influence research. This work contributes theoretically to the WOM and social influence literatures, and it substantively helps consumers better understand how the actions of those they recommend to can (perhaps unknowingly) have an outsized effect on one's own subsequent perceptions and behaviors.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data are publicly available. The link is provided in our manuscript and the Appendix MDA.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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