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Author(s): Sarah G. Moore

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# Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid: How Word of Mouth Influences the Storyteller

SARAH G. MOORE

Consumers frequently tell stories about consumption experiences through word of mouth (WOM). These WOM stories may be told traditionally, through spoken, face-to-face conversation, or nontraditionally, through written online reviews or other electronic channels. Past research has focused on how traditional and nontraditional WOM influences listeners and firms. This research instead addresses how specific linguistic content in nontraditional WOM influences the storyteller. The current article focuses on explaining language content, through which storytellers reason about why experiences happened or why experiences were liked or disliked. Four studies examine how and why explaining language influences storytellers' evaluations of and intentions to repeat, recommend, and retell stories about their experiences. Compared to nonexplaining language, explaining language influences storytellers by increasing their understanding of consumption experiences. Understanding dampens storytellers' evaluations of and intentions toward positive and negative hedonic experiences but polarizes storytellers' evaluations of and intentions toward positive and negative utilitarian experiences.

Telling stories is a universal and fundamental human activity. Through stories, we translate and interpret our experiences, both to understand them and to communicate them to others (Schank and Abelson 1995). Word of mouth (WOM) is a common type of storytelling that encompasses consumer-to-consumer communication about consumption experiences (Carl 2006; Godes et al. 2005), whether these are hedonic experiences such as eating a sublime dessert or utilitarian experiences such as grocery shopping. While WOM stories traditionally have been told through one-on-one, face-to-face conversation, they are now also told nontraditionally, through one-to-many, written communication via electronic media (Godes et al. 2005). Nontraditional WOM, such as posting a review on Amazon.com, has grown exponentially over the past decade (Das and Chen 2007) and is an important

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Sarah G. Moore is assistant professor of marketing at the Alberta School of Business, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada, T6G 2R6 (sarah.g.moore@ualberta.ca). This article is based on the author's doctoral dissertation. The author thanks her dissertation committee members, John Lynch, Beth Marsh, and especially Jim Bettman and Gavan Fitzsimons, the committee cochairs, for their invaluable advice and unwavering support. The author also thanks the editor, the associate editor, the reviewers, and seminar participants for valuable feedback on the manuscript. Financial support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada is gratefully acknowledged.

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new form of consumer-to-consumer communication (Chen and Xie 2008). The current research focuses on such nontraditional WOM stories.

Regardless of the medium in which stories are shared, however, both traditional and nontraditional WOM are fundamental to marketing (Hampton 2006; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Hearing positive or negative WOM influences consumers' product trial and adoption (Arndt 1967; Sheth 1971), switching behavior (Wangenheim and Bayon 2004), and attitudes (Bone 1995), which in turn influence firms' sales and revenues (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006; Dellarocas, Zhang, and Awad 2007). Yet, despite this body of work, some key aspects of WOM remain poorly understood.

First, existing work does not consider the impact of WOM on the storyteller (Ozcan and Ramaswamy 2010; but see Woodside and Delozier 1976), though such a process would have implications for firms and for consumers. I examine how telling WOM stories influences consumers' evaluations of their past consumption experiences, their intentions to repeat and recommend these experiences, and their likelihood of spreading future WOM and telling others about these experiences. Second, prior work has overlooked content and focused on the valence of WOM (Richins 1983; but see Schellekens, Verlegh, and Smidts 2010), yet content is key to understanding its impact (Godes et al. 2005). I consider valence and content, with a focus on *explaining language* content in WOM, which addresses why experiences happened or why experiences were liked or disliked. I find that, compared to nonexplaining language, explaining language influences storytellers by increasing

their understanding of consumption experiences. Understanding dampens storytellers' evaluations of and intentions toward positive and negative hedonic experiences but polarizes storytellers' evaluations of and intentions toward positive and negative utilitarian experiences. Thus, explaining language in WOM has some paradoxical effects on the storyteller that have implications for firms and for consumers.

Below, I present a framework for how WOM influences the storyteller. I build on research in psychology about understanding experiences (Gilbert, Wilson, and Centerbar 2003; Park 2010) to predict how and why explaining language content influences storytellers in the context of written, nontraditional WOM. I then report on four studies that test these predictions.

## HOW WOM INFLUENCES THE STORYTELLER

Individuals attempt to understand their past experiences in order to reduce uncertainty and manage future utility (Gilbert et al. 2003; Heider 1958; Park 2010; Pennebaker 1997). While attempts to understand occur regularly in response to various events (Heider 1958; Wilson and Gilbert 2008), they are especially likely following negative, unexpected, or emotional events (Wilson and Gilbert 2008; Wong and Weiner 1981). These attempts to understand can occur through various cognitive processes, such as narrative building (Pennebaker and Seagal 1999), analytical writing (Lyubomirsky, Sousa, and Dickerhoof 2006; Pennebaker 1997), or explaining (Malle 2004). If successful, these cognitive processes help individuals "make sense of" and achieve an understanding of the causes and outcomes of their experiences (Currier, Holland, and Neimeyer 2006; Janoff-Bulman and Frantz 1997; Wilson and Gilbert 2008).

Achieving understanding has various consequences. A great deal of work demonstrates that understanding a traumatic experience, such as an unexpected bereavement, can improve physical health and overall well-being (Pennebaker 1997; Smyth 1998). In addition, more recent work shows that understanding also has consequences for less extreme emotional experiences. Understanding negative events, such as romantic breakups (Boals and Klein 2005; Lyubomirsky et al. 2006), job losses (Spera, Buhrfeind, and Pennebaker 1994), or disturbing video clips (Mendolia and Kleck 1993), leads individuals to feel less intense negative emotions about these events and to recover from them more quickly. Similarly, understanding positive events, such as graduating from high school (Lyubomirsky et al. 2006), leads individuals to feel less intense positive emotions about these events. In these studies, understanding is achieved in various ways, for example, through analytical thinking or writing (Lyubomirsky et al. 2006; Pennebaker 1997), yet each of these cognitive processes dampens individuals' emotional responses to the event in question. The opposite pattern emerges when individuals do not engage in such cognitive processes. When individuals are prevented from understanding events (Wilson et al. 2005) or are unable to understand (traumatic) events

(Jind 2003), or when individuals ruminate about negative (Michael and Snyder 2005) or savor positive events (Bryant and Veroff 2006; Lyubomirsky et al. 2006), the emotions associated with these experiences persist.

In essence, this work suggests that when individuals analyze emotional experiences, the emotional impact of that experience is lessened. That is, regardless of the cognitive process involved or the content of specific cognitions, adding a cognitive element to an emotional experience reduces its impact through increasing understanding of the event (Park 2010; Smyth 1998; Wilson and Gilbert 2008). However, prior work has neglected the specific cognitive processes involved in understanding; few studies examine how individuals come to understand experiences, and even fewer test understanding as a mediating process. Further, this work has largely focused on intense negative emotional experiences (e.g. breakups, bereavement) rather than on less intense positive and negative emotional experiences or on cognitive experiences.

In the current article, I examine common hedonic and utilitarian consumption experiences in an experimental context to establish how the specific tool of explaining language helps storytellers understand their experiences. This approach contributes to prior work on understanding and WOM in several ways. First, where past research on understanding has largely used subjective measures and correlational designs (Park 2010), I use an experimental context to measure explaining language and understanding and their consequences and to test the relationships between these constructs. Second, in focusing on explaining language, I provide a specific and concrete measure of one cognitive process that leads to understanding. Further, I broaden theory on understanding by testing the impact of explaining language and understanding on everyday positive and negative hedonic and utilitarian experiences rather than on traumatic or negative emotional experiences. Finally, instead of focusing on the valence of WOM or its impact on listeners and firms, I examine how specific WOM content affects the storytellers' evaluations of and intentions to repeat, recommend, and retell stories about their experiences.

Below, I discuss *explaining language* as one specific form of cognition that helps individuals understand consumption experiences. I then outline the consequences of understanding consumption experiences for storytellers.

### Explaining Language and Understanding

This article examines explaining language as a way for storytellers to understand consumption experiences. It focuses on explaining language for two reasons. First, explanations are a common (Malle 2004) and effective way of achieving understanding, and they should be easier to generate for consumption experiences than for traumatic experiences, which may be inexplicable (Jind 2003). Further, regardless of the content or accuracy of specific explanations, generating explanations leads to understanding (Baum, Friedman, and Zakowski 1997; Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson 1998; Taylor 1983). Second, written or spoken language is a more effective way of achieving

understanding than thinking (Lyubomirsky et al. 2006), and written language is a key aspect of nontraditional WOM (e.g., online reviews; Godes et al. 2005).

Explaining language involves generating explanations for why experiences happened (e.g., "I bought the yummy cookies because they were his favorite"; Pennebaker 1997) or why they were liked or disliked (e.g., "I adored the cookies because they had sprinkles"; Malle 2004). As with other cognitive processes, using explaining language should help storytellers understand why their hedonic and utilitarian consumption experiences occurred and why they reacted the way they did to these experiences (Wilson and Gilbert 2008). In contrast, using language that involves replaying or describing consumption experiences without explaining them should not help consumers understand these experiences (e.g., "I bought some awesome sprinkle cookies"; Bryant and Veroff 2006; Lyubomirsky et al. 2006).

The current studies measure and manipulate explaining language to examine its influence on understanding. Individuals who use explaining language in WOM stories are compared to individuals who use no explaining language in WOM stories and to those who do not tell stories. Understanding is assessed by measuring how well individuals understand why an experience occurred and why they reacted as they did to the experience. Compared to individuals who do not tell stories and to those who use no explaining language in their stories, individuals using explaining language in their stories should better understand their experiences. Further, among those using explaining language, a higher proportion of explaining should lead to better understanding than a lower proportion of explaining. These differences in understanding, prompted by differential use of explaining language, should have important consequences for consumers and are discussed next.

### Consequences of Understanding

The current studies focus on consequences of understanding that are critical to WOM: storytellers' evaluations of experiences, their intentions to repeat and recommend experiences, and their likelihood of retelling stories about experiences. Explaining language will influence these outcomes through increasing understanding. However, the direction in which these outcomes are influenced will depend on the valence and type of the experience in question. This article examines positive and negative hedonic and utilitarian experiences.

Hedonic experiences are chosen for pleasure and are affective and sensory in nature, while utilitarian experiences are chosen to accomplish a goal and are more instrumental (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2000; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Thus, overall evaluations of hedonic experiences are primarily based on sensations or emotions (fun, frightening), and evaluations of utilitarian experiences are primarily based on functions or cognitions (practical, useless; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003). While experiences can be both high and low in hedonic and utilitarian characteristics, the current studies focus on experiences that are largely one or the other to test the impact of explaining language and

understanding on each type. Given the emotional versus cognitive bases of hedonic and utilitarian experiences, understanding should differentially influence overall evaluations of these experiences. Below, I outline how explaining language and understanding influence consumers' evaluations of and intentions to repeat and recommend hedonic and utilitarian experiences. I then discuss how explaining language and understanding influence the likelihood of retelling for each type of experience.

*Evaluations of Hedonic Experiences.* Like the experiences examined in prior work, hedonic experiences are largely emotional. Consistent with this work, then, when individuals explain hedonic experiences, they should achieve an understanding of these experiences, and their emotional reactions to these experiences should be attenuated (Park 2010; Wilson and Gilbert 2008). That is, using explaining language should dampen the emotional impact of positive and negative hedonic experiences and thus dampen overall evaluations of these experiences. For example, explaining that the service in a restaurant was fast because the restaurant was empty should decrease evaluations of the restaurant by decreasing positive emotions such as gratitude. Conversely, explaining that the service was slow because an oven was broken should increase evaluations of the restaurant by decreasing negative emotions such as anger. Thus, compared to those who use less (or no) explaining language, individuals who use more explaining language should evaluate positive hedonic experiences less positively and negative hedonic experiences less negatively. Consistent with these evaluative changes, explaining language should decrease consumers' intentions to repeat and recommend positive hedonic experiences and increase consumers' intentions to repeat and recommend negative hedonic experiences.

**H1a:** Individuals using more explaining language will evaluate positive hedonic experiences less positively and negative hedonic experiences less negatively than individuals using less (or no) explaining language.

**H1b:** Individuals using more explaining language will be less likely to repeat and recommend positive hedonic experiences and more likely to repeat and recommend negative hedonic experiences than individuals using less (or no) explaining language.

*Evaluations of Utilitarian Experiences.* In contrast to hedonic experiences, evaluations of utilitarian experiences are based on cognition, not emotion; thus, understanding these experiences will not dampen evaluations by attenuating their emotional power. Instead, using explaining language should polarize overall evaluations through repeating or emphasizing the cognitions underlying the utilitarian experience (Downing, Judd, and Brauer 1992; Tesser 1975). For example, explaining that a USB stick is liked because it stores all of one's data should increase evaluations by confirming the product's use-

fulness and functionality. Conversely, explaining that a USB stick is disliked because it stores only some of one's data should decrease evaluations by confirming the product's uselessness and lack of functionality. Thus, compared to those who use less (or no) explaining language, individuals who use more explaining language should evaluate positive utilitarian experiences more positively and negative utilitarian experiences more negatively. Consistent with these evaluative changes, explaining language should increase consumers' intentions to repeat and recommend positive experiences, and decrease consumers' intentions to repeat and recommend negative experiences.

**H2a:** Individuals using relatively more explaining language will evaluate positive utilitarian experiences more positively and negative utilitarian experiences more negatively than individuals using less (or no) explaining language.

**H2b:** Individuals using relatively more explaining language will be more likely to repeat and recommend positive utilitarian experiences and less likely to repeat and recommend negative utilitarian experiences than individuals using less (or no) explaining language.

*Understanding as a Mediator.* In addition to the direct effect of explaining language on consumers' evaluations and intentions, understanding should mediate the relationship between explaining language and these outcomes. A moderated mediation pattern is predicted: while explaining language should always increase individuals' understanding of experiences, the influence of understanding on evaluations should be moderated by experience valence. That is, an understanding by valence interaction will mediate the relationship between explaining language and evaluations and intentions for hedonic and utilitarian experiences. For hedonic experiences, understanding will dampen overall evaluations: as understanding increases, evaluations of positive experiences will decrease and evaluations of negative experiences will increase. For utilitarian experiences, understanding will polarize overall evaluations: as understanding increases, evaluations of positive experiences will increase and evaluations of negative experiences will decrease.

**H3:** An understanding by valence interaction will mediate the relationship between explaining language and evaluations and intentions. Explaining language will always increase understanding, but increased understanding will dampen evaluations and intentions for hedonic experiences and polarize evaluations and intentions for utilitarian experiences.

*Likelihood of Retelling.* The final two hypotheses address the impact of storytelling on consumers' likelihood of retelling stories and sharing WOM in the future. As with evaluations, the influence of explaining language on retelling

should depend on experience type and should be mediated by understanding. In the hedonic realm, stories about emotional and unusual experiences—those that are not yet understood—are the most compelling (Heath, Bell, and Sternberg 2001; Tversky and Marsh 2000) and are shared to entertain or create social bonds (Dichter 1966). Once explaining language attenuates the emotional power of hedonic experiences, individuals should be less likely to share these experiences in the future, decreasing the spread of WOM. In the utilitarian realm, WOM may be shared to help others or provide information (Dichter 1966), making explanations relevant and useful (Grice 1975). Thus, using explaining language should increase the spread of WOM about utilitarian experiences. Understanding should mediate the effects of explaining language on likelihood of retelling.

**H4:** Individuals using relatively more explaining language will be less likely to retell stories about hedonic experiences and more likely to retell stories about utilitarian experiences than individuals using less (or no) explaining language.

**H5:** Understanding will mediate the effect of explaining language on retelling.

*Overview of Studies.* In sum, explaining language should help storytellers understand their positive and negative hedonic and utilitarian consumption experiences, and understanding should have important consequences for storytellers' evaluations of and intentions toward these experiences. One field study and three experiments that test these hypotheses are reported below. Study 1 uses Amazon.com reviews to establish a basic relationship between explaining language and evaluations of hedonic experiences in a natural WOM context. Study 2 uses an experimental context to prime language use and test understanding as a mediator of the relationship between explaining language and evaluations of hedonic experiences. Studies 3A and 3B use a stringent language manipulation to confirm the unique influence of explaining language on evaluations, and study 3B tests these predictions in the context of utilitarian, instead of hedonic, experiences.

## STUDY 1

Study 1 uses a natural WOM context to examine the relationship between evaluations (star ratings) and explaining language in Amazon.com reviews of fiction books. Although this correlational design makes it difficult to determine causality, it provides initial evidence for the impact of explaining language in a real-world online WOM setting. Because of the hedonic nature of fictional books, individuals using less explaining language in their reviews should rate books more extremely (one or five stars out of five) than individuals using more explaining language, who should rate books less extremely (three stars). That is, there should be a negative linear relationship between explaining language and the absolute extremity of star ratings (the distance from the middle

rating of three stars). Such a pattern would be consistent with hypothesis 1a, that explaining language can dampen evaluations of hedonic experiences, and would confirm that explaining language has some relationship with individuals' evaluations.

## Method

Ten reviews each of 10 different books were collected from Amazon.com in May 2007. One book per year between 1998 and 2007 was randomly chosen from the *Publishers Weekly* annual list of fiction bestsellers. The 10 books had a range of star ratings ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ) and a large number of reviews each (151–1,345 per book). To ensure that evaluations varied within books, two reviews at each star level (one through five) were randomly selected for each book. The star rating, title, posting date, and full text of each review were downloaded, as well as the identity of the reviewer and the number of other reviews they had completed.

To measure language use, two independent coders classified the sentences in each review as neutral, explaining, or nonexplaining ( $\kappa = 0.69$ ); disagreements were resolved through discussion. Neutral sentences provided nonevaluative information (e.g., "I bought this book online"). Explaining sentences were evaluative and included explanations of the individuals' or others' actions (e.g., "I bought this splendid book because it's a bestseller") or of the individuals' evaluations (e.g., "This book was splendid because it had unique characters"). Nonexplaining sentences also provided evaluative descriptions of the book or of individuals' reactions to the book (e.g., "I couldn't stop reading this splendid book") but did not contain explanations.

From this coding, the proportion of explaining language (PEL) in the review was calculated by dividing the number of explaining sentences by the total number of explaining and nonexplaining sentences in the review ( $E / [E + NE]$ ), so that a higher PEL indicates relatively more explaining language. Neutral sentences constituted a small proportion of the total number of sentences ( $prop_N = 0.12$ ) and were not expected to influence evaluations; they were excluded from the PEL measure. Including them in the PEL measure does not affect the results given below.

## Results

On average, reviews were 153 words long ( $SD = 133$ ), and PEL was 0.35 ( $SD = 0.23$ ). To test hypothesis 1a, that more explaining language would be associated with less extreme evaluations, star ratings were coded as extreme (one or five stars), moderate (two or four stars), or neutral (three stars). An ordered logistic regression using PEL to predict the recoded star ratings revealed a significant relationship ( $\chi^2(N = 100) = 19.75$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Reviews with extreme star ratings had a lower proportion of explaining language ( $M = 0.19$ ) than moderate ( $M = 0.44$ ;  $\chi^2(N = 60) = 5.39$ ,  $p < .02$ ) and neutral reviews ( $M = 0.56$ ;  $\chi^2(N = 60) = 5.18$ ,  $p < .02$ ). Number of reviews completed, review length

(word count), and a variable representing the book were included as covariates; none of these variables were significant. A quadratic analysis also showed a significant relationship between PEL and star ratings ( $F(2, 98) = 36.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with more extreme positive and negative star ratings associated with less explaining language.

## Discussion

Study 1 shows that more explaining language is related to less extreme positive and less extreme negative book evaluations. However, this correlational study leaves open some alternative explanations for the relationship between explaining language and evaluations of hedonic experiences. For example, an unmeasured individual difference, such as need for cognition, could have influenced both explaining language and evaluations. To address this and other individual-level explanations, a within-subjects sample was collected. One hundred and eighty-seven reviews were drawn from 10 Amazon.com reviewers, resulting in 14–22 reviews per person ( $M_{\text{word count}} = 194$ ,  $SD = 135$ ;  $M_{\text{PEL}} = 0.39$ ,  $SD = 0.23$ ). As with the between-subjects sample, the within-subjects sample ( $\chi^2(N = 187) = 40.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ) demonstrated that reviews with extreme star ratings had less explaining language ( $M = 0.29$ ) than moderate ( $M = 0.39$ ;  $\chi^2(N = 118) = 20.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and neutral reviews ( $M = 0.61$ ;  $\chi^2(N = 107) = 24.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

This within-reviewer data addresses some, but not all, alternative explanations for these findings. In both Amazon samples, pre-writing evaluations were unavailable and explaining language was measured. Thus, individuals' pre-writing evaluations may have influenced both explaining language and final evaluations or explaining language may be correlated with other aspects of language that instead influence final evaluations. Study 2 addresses these issues by measuring initial evaluations and manipulating language to minimize variations in language use. Further, study 2 measures intentions as well as evaluations to test additional outcomes of explaining language, and it also measures understanding to test it as a mediator.

## STUDY 2

Study 2 uses a Scrambled Sentence Task (SST; Srull and Wyer 1979) to manipulate storytelling language. Prior to writing about a positive or negative hedonic experience, participants completed an SST that primed either explaining or nonexplaining language or completed a control SST. The explain prime should increase use of explaining language in stories relative to the nonexplain prime such that, after writing, explain prime participants will have less extreme evaluations and intentions to repeat and recommend their experiences than nonexplain prime participants. While control prime participants' evaluations and intentions will not be influenced by the prime, these outcomes will be influenced by the language used in their stories. Given that individuals have a stronger tendency to explain negative than positive events (Wong and Weiner 1981), when writing about negative experiences, con-

control prime participants should use as much explaining language as explain prime participants; therefore, they should have similar evaluations and intentions. However, when writing about positive experiences, control prime participants should use as little explaining language as nonexplain prime participants; therefore, they should have similar evaluations and intentions.

In addition to testing hypotheses 1a and 1b, that explaining language will dampen evaluations of and intentions to repeat and recommend hedonic experiences, study 2 tests hypothesis 3, that understanding mediates this process. Participants' use of explaining language, due either to the explain prime or to writing about a negative experience, should increase understanding of why an experience happened or why it was liked or disliked compared to the other conditions. These differences in understanding should mediate differences in evaluations among conditions. Further, study 2 tests hypotheses 4 and 5, those about future WOM, by asking participants how likely they are to retell their story. The more individuals have explained their hedonic experience, the less willing they should be to tell others about it in the future; understanding should mediate this relationship as well.

## Method

One hundred and two graduate and professional students participated in return for a cash payment. Participants were instructed to recall either a positive or negative hedonic experience that had occurred within the past 6 months; they were given examples of hedonic experiences such as going to a movie, going on vacation, dining out, or going to a concert. Participants then wrote a one-sentence description of their experience and rated how positive/negative and good/bad it was on two 9-point scales ( $r = 0.98, p < .001$ ). After completing these pre-writing evaluation measures, participants completed the SST, comprising 20 sets of five words in a random order; each set of five words contained one prime word, and each set was presented on a separate screen. Participants were asked to form these sets of words into coherent four-word sentences. There were three SST conditions: explain, nonexplain, and control. The explain prime contained words such as *because*, *think*, *insight*, and *realize*; the nonexplain prime contained words such as *intense*, *feel*, *relive*, and *describe*; the control prime contained neutral words such as *purple*, *pencil*, and *chair*. Overall, the study was a 2 (valence: positive or negative)  $\times$  3 (SST: explain, nonexplain, control) between-subjects design.

After the SST, participants wrote about their consumption experience. Participants were instructed to explore their thoughts and feelings about the experience, not to worry about spelling or grammar, and to write until they had said everything they needed to say about the experience (Pennebaker 1997). Participants then reported their evaluation of the experience on 9-point scales (good/bad, appealing/unappealing, positive/negative, liked/disliked) and their likelihood of repeating, recommending, and retelling about the experience on 7-point scales (1 = not at all likely, 7 =

very likely). A four-item scale was created to measure individuals' understanding of their experience (I understand why this experience happened; I understand the reasons I like/dislike this experience; I can explain my feelings about this experience; I know why I chose this experience; 1 = not at all – 7 = very much). Participants also reported how difficult it was to write their stories on a four-item scale. Finally, a funnel debriefing was conducted to ensure that participants had not guessed the hypotheses or the purpose of the SST (none had).

## Results

On average, participants' stories were 145 words long ( $SD = 45$ ); valence and prime did not influence word count ( $p > .30$ ). Two independent coders classified each sentence in the stories to create the PEL, as in study 1 ( $\kappa = 0.85, M = 0.34, SD = 0.24$ ). Stories were also coded to ensure that they were about hedonic experiences; 92% of participants wrote about a hedonic experience (45% about food, 30% about goods such as party dresses, 26% about entertainment such as movies). A factor analysis (using promax rotation) on the post-writing measures confirmed two factors: evaluation (eigenvalue = 5.22; items: good/bad, appealing/unappealing, liked/disliked, positive/negative, likelihood of repeating/recommending;  $\alpha = 0.99$ ) and understanding (eigenvalue = 2.90;  $\alpha = 0.77$ ). Likelihood of retelling did not factor with evaluations; it was standardized and left as a single-item measure. However, intentions to repeat and recommend the experience did factor with evaluations; these variables were standardized and combined into one dependent variable for brevity. Analyzing them separately yields similar results.

*Language Use.* To confirm the success of the SST prime, the proportion of explaining language (PEL) between conditions was examined. A model using valence and prime to predict PEL ( $F(5, 96) = 4.23, p < .002$ ) revealed a main effect of prime ( $F(2, 96) = 9.09, p < .001$ ). Participants in the explain prime conditions used the highest proportion of explaining language ( $M = 0.47$ ) compared to those in the control ( $M = 0.32; F(1, 96) = 6.62, p < .01$ ) and nonexplain conditions ( $M = 0.23; F(1, 96) = 17.84, p < .01$ ), which differed marginally from one another ( $F(1, 96) = 2.76, p < .10$ ).

Next, specific contrasts were conducted to determine if the a priori predictions about PEL in the control prime conditions were correct. As expected, when individuals wrote about negative experiences, PEL in the control ( $M = 0.39$ ) and explain ( $M = 0.49$ ) conditions was equivalent ( $F(1, 96) = 1.70, p > .20$ ), while PEL in the nonexplain condition ( $M = 0.25$ ) was marginally lower than the control ( $F(1, 96) = 2.85, p < .09$ ) and significantly lower than the explain condition ( $F(1, 96) = 9.51, p < .001$ ). However, when individuals wrote about positive experiences, PEL in the control ( $M = 0.26$ ) and nonexplain ( $M = 0.21$ ) conditions was equivalent ( $F(1, 96) = 0.45, p > .50$ ), while PEL in the explain condition ( $M = 0.45$ ) was higher than the control

( $F(1, 96) = 5.50, p < .02$ ) and the nonexplain conditions ( $F(2, 47) = 8.40, p < .005$ ). Thus, control prime individuals tended to explain negative but not positive experiences in their stories. These levels of explaining language are consistent with the prediction that evaluations should be equivalent in the negative explain and control conditions and in the positive nonexplain and control conditions.

**Evaluations.** A model using valence, language prime, and their interactions to predict final evaluations ( $F(5, 96) = 172.57, p < .0001$ ) showed a marginal main effect of prime ( $F(2, 96) = 2.60, p < .07$ ), a main effect of valence ( $F(1, 96) = 844.01, p < .001$ ), and a valence by prime interaction ( $F(2, 96) = 3.25, p < .04$ ). Models controlling for initial evaluations and word count showed identical results, as did a model using a change score between pre-writing and final evaluations as a dependent variable.

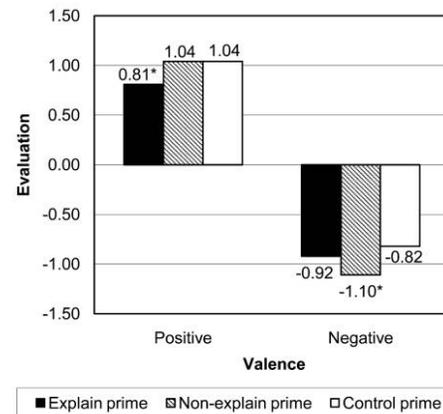
Follow-up analyses supported hypotheses 1a and 1b (fig. 1). Participants in the explain prime condition who wrote about positive experiences had less positive evaluations ( $M = 0.81$ ) than participants in the nonexplain ( $M = 1.04$ ;  $F(1, 96) = 5.57, p < .02$ ) and the control conditions ( $M = 1.04$ ;  $F(1, 96) = 4.44, p < .04$ ), which did not differ from one another ( $F(1, 96) = 0.15, p > .70$ ). Further, participants in the nonexplain prime condition who wrote about negative experiences had more negative evaluations ( $M = -1.10$ ) than participants in the explain ( $M = -0.92$ ;  $F(1, 96) = 3.59, p < .06$ ) and control conditions ( $M = -0.82$ ;  $F(1, 96) = 8.35, p < .005$ ), which did not differ from one another ( $F(1, 96) = 1.11, p > .29$ ).

**Mediation.** The mediation model was tested in two steps. Ultimately, the influence of the SST prime on evaluations should be mediated by understanding. However, since the prime manipulation influenced explaining language (PEL), PEL was tested first as a mediator of the relationship between prime and understanding (fig. 2). As expected, prime predicted understanding ( $F(2, 99) = 3.20, p < .04$ ), such that understanding was higher in the explain prime condition ( $M = 4.65$ ) than in the control ( $M = 3.82$ ;  $F(1, 96) = 3.25, p < .05$ ) or nonexplain prime conditions ( $M = 3.51$ ;  $F(1, 96) = 6.00, p < .01$ ). As above, prime also predicted PEL ( $F(2, 96) = 9.09, p < .001$ ). Finally, higher PEL predicted greater understanding ( $t(95) = 2.24, p < .03$ ). Bootstrapping (Preacher and Hayes 2008) confirmed that PEL mediated the relationship between prime and understanding (CI: 0.02–0.37,  $p < .05$ ).

Next, following Edwards and Lambert (2007), understanding was tested as a mediator of the relationship between the prime manipulation and final evaluations, controlling for explaining language (PEL) throughout. In this mediation model, both the direct effect of prime on evaluations and the indirect effect of prime on evaluations, through understanding, are moderated by experience valence; increased explaining language and understanding decrease evaluations of positive hedonic experiences but increase evaluations of negative hedonic experiences. Thus, the indirect effect of the understanding by valence interaction was tested as a

FIGURE 1

EVALUATIONS BY VALENCE AND PRIME: STUDY 2



NOTE.—Means marked with an asterisk (\*) are significantly different from other means within that category.

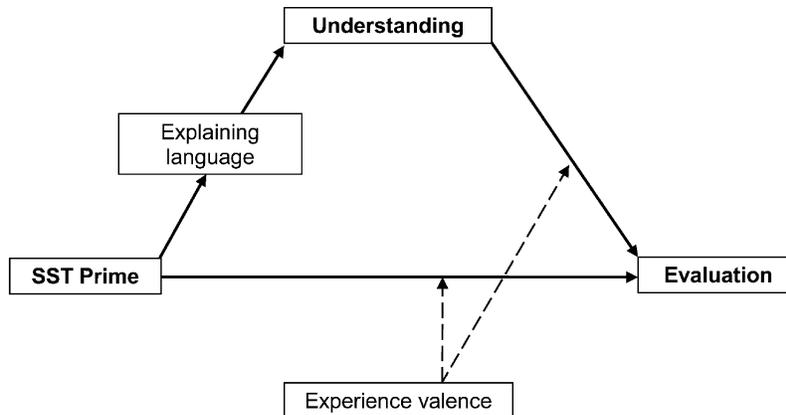
predictor of evaluations when controlling for the direct effect of the prime by valence interaction on evaluations, which was significant, as demonstrated above. Hypothesis 3 was supported. The understanding by valence interaction predicted evaluations ( $\beta = 0.297$ ;  $t(96) = 4.53, p < .001$ ) even when controlling for the prime by valence interaction, which was no longer significant ( $\beta = -0.049$ ;  $t(96) = -0.66, p > .25$ ). The mediation pathway was significant for positive and negative experiences ( $\beta_{\text{positive}} = 0.06, \beta_{\text{negative}} = -0.02$ ;  $p < .05$ ), indicating that understanding positive hedonic experiences decreased evaluations and understanding negative hedonic experiences increased evaluations.

**Retelling.** Finally, hypotheses 4 and 5 were tested to examine the relationship between explaining language, understanding, and individuals' willingness to spread WOM in the future. A model using prime, valence, and their interaction to predict likelihood of retelling ( $F(5, 96) = 3.86, p < .003$ ) showed main effects of valence ( $F(1, 96) = 9.23, p < .003$ ) and prime ( $F(2, 96) = 4.32, p < .02$ ). Participants reported a higher likelihood of retelling about positive ( $M = 0.32$ ) than negative experiences ( $M = -0.25$ ). Supporting hypothesis 4, participants reported a higher likelihood of retelling in the nonexplain ( $M = 0.37$ ) than in the explain prime conditions ( $M = -0.29$ ;  $F(1, 96) = 8.63, p < .004$ ). The control prime condition ( $M = 0.03$ ) did not differ from the explain ( $F(1, 96) = 2.08, p > .15$ ) or the nonexplain prime conditions ( $F(1, 96) = 2.24, p > .13$ ).

To test whether understanding mediated these effects, valence, prime, and understanding were used to predict likelihood of retelling. Supporting hypothesis 5, the better participants understood their hedonic experience, the less likely they were to retell it in the future ( $t(1, 95) = -8.63, p < .01$ ). The main

FIGURE 2

MEDIATION MODEL: STUDY 2



effects of prime and valence were no longer significant in this model. Mediation tests using bootstrapping (Preacher and Hayes 2008) confirmed that the effects of valence and prime on participants' likelihood of spreading future WOM were mediated by understanding ( $CI_{\text{valence}}: 0.79\text{--}2.11$ ;  $CI_{\text{prime}}: 0.21\text{--}0.91$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

## Discussion

Study 2 provided strong support for the current framework by measuring initial evaluations, manipulating language use, and demonstrating the mediating effect of understanding on evaluations and intentions. In this study, priming individuals to use more explaining language in their stories led them to understand their hedonic experiences, and understanding led to decreased evaluations of positive experiences and increased evaluations of negative experiences. Study 2 also demonstrated an important consequence of understanding: participants who better understood their hedonic experiences reported that they would be less likely to spread WOM in the future.

While this study ruled out some alternative explanations for the results, some other explanations remain. First, individuals' evaluations may have been influenced by the ease or difficulty of expressing their experience instead of by their understanding of the experience; specifically, difficulty in using explaining language could dampen evaluations (Schwarz 2004; Wänke, Bohner, and Jurkowsch 1997). However, neither valence, prime, nor explaining language influenced reported difficulty in writing ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ;  $p > 0.50$ ), and difficulty in writing did not predict evaluations ( $t(1, 100) = -0.23$ ,  $p > 0.82$ ) or retelling ( $t(1, 100) = -0.45$ ,  $p > .65$ ). Second, it is possible that differences in language use other than explaining could have influenced individuals' evaluations in this study. While language use was primed, participants still wrote stories freehand. If individuals who use more explaining language are writing

more complex or detailed stories that include more inconsistent or irrelevant information, their evaluations would show the dampening pattern found in study 2 (Tetlock and Boettger 1989). Studies 3A and 3B address this issue by using a fill-in-the-blank methodology that controls for differences in language use beyond explaining.

In addition to leaving open this alternative explanation, study 2 did not establish the effects of explaining language relative to a true control condition, since control prime participants still wrote stories. Thus, compared to those who do not express themselves in writing, the impact of explaining language on individuals' evaluations is unclear. Studies 3A and 3B use no-writing control conditions to establish the unique role of explaining language in dampening evaluations. These studies also ask individuals to imagine that they are writing an online review to incorporate an implied audience, an important component of nontraditional WOM. Finally, while study 3A uses hedonic experiences, study 3B uses utilitarian experiences to examine how explaining these experiences affects evaluations.

## STUDIES 3A AND 3B

Studies 3A and 3B use a "mad libs" paradigm where individuals write about their consumption experiences by filling in the blanks of provided sentences. These final studies were conducted with three goals in mind. First, they were designed to rule out alternative explanations based on the types of information individuals might incorporate into their stories when using explaining versus nonexplaining language. These studies use fill-in-the-blanks sentences to manipulate language use and control for content differences in stories other than explaining. Second, they establish the unique role of explaining language in altering evaluations by comparing individuals in an explain condition to individuals in a no-writing control condition. Finally, these two studies examine an important moderator of the impact of

explaining language: experience type. In study 3A, individuals recalled and wrote about a hedonic dining experience; in line with studies 1 and 2 and hypotheses 1a and 1b, explaining language should dampen evaluations of these experiences. In study 3B, individuals recalled and wrote about a utilitarian technology product; as outlined in hypotheses 2a and 2b, explaining language should polarize, instead of dampen, individuals' evaluations of utilitarian experiences.

### Study 3A: Hedonic Experiences

Participants in this study completed either an explaining or a nonexplaining story shell by filling in the blanks in a series of sentences. The only difference between the story shells was that some sentences in the explaining shell had explaining clauses. For example, one of the nonexplaining sentences was: "The best part of the whole experience was \_\_\_\_\_," while the explaining counterpart was: "The best part of the whole experience was \_\_\_\_\_, because \_\_\_\_\_." The story shell for study 3A was developed based on study 2 and an unreported study where individuals wrote about a recent consumption experience of any kind; in both studies, nearly 50% of stories were food related, so story shells for study 3A were written about a dining experience. The story shell included information that was commonly provided in stories about eating out—where the experience occurred, who was there, whether the food and the service were good, and so forth.

The study used a 2 (valence: positive or negative)  $\times$  3 (story shell: explain, nonexplain, or none) between-subjects design. Participants recalled a dining experience from the past 6 months that was either positive or negative and then completed either the explaining or the nonexplaining story shell before reporting their evaluation of the experience. In the no-writing control condition, participants did not complete a story shell; they simply recalled a positive or negative dining experience before reporting their evaluations. As outlined in hypotheses 1a and 1b, explain shell participants should have less extreme evaluations than nonexplain shell or control condition participants, who should have equivalent evaluations, since they were simply describing or recalling their hedonic experience without explaining.

**Method.** Undergraduates ( $N = 72$ ) participated in return for a cash payment. First, participants were asked to recall either a positive or a negative dining experience. Participants in the writing conditions then imagined that they were writing an online review about their experience; they read that the Web site they were using had a guided online review process, so they would be given a series of sentences with blanks to fill in about their experience. They were told that they could fill in the blanks using any words they wished and as many words as they wished as long as the final sentence was coherent. They were asked to write exactly what they would say in a real online review for a Web site such as Amazon or Yelp. On the next page of the booklet, participants in the writing conditions saw the explain or the

nonexplain story shell. The nonexplain shell had 11 sentences with 22 blanks; the explain shell had explanatory clauses added to eight of the nonexplain shell sentences (see the appendix). Control condition participants did not see a story shell; they simply recalled an experience without writing about it.

Next, participants reported their evaluations of the experience on the 9-point scales from study 2, as well as their intentions to repeat, recommend, and retell about the experience on 7-point scales marked "not at all" to "very likely." Evaluations and intentions to repeat and recommend loaded on a single factor (eigenvalue: 5.68;  $\alpha = 0.97$ ) and were standardized and combined to create an overall evaluation measure for each participant; likelihood of retelling did not factor with these measures and was left as a single standardized item. Finally, story shell participants rated how difficult it was to fill in the blanks about their experience (two items,  $r = 0.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

**Results.** A model using valence and story shell to predict evaluations ( $F(5, 66) = 76.4$ ,  $p < .0001$ ) revealed a main effect of valence ( $F(1, 66) = 259.02$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and an interaction between valence and story shell ( $F(1, 66) = 6.74$ ,  $p < .002$ ). Planned contrasts revealed the predicted pattern of means, supporting hypotheses 1a and 1b (fig. 3).

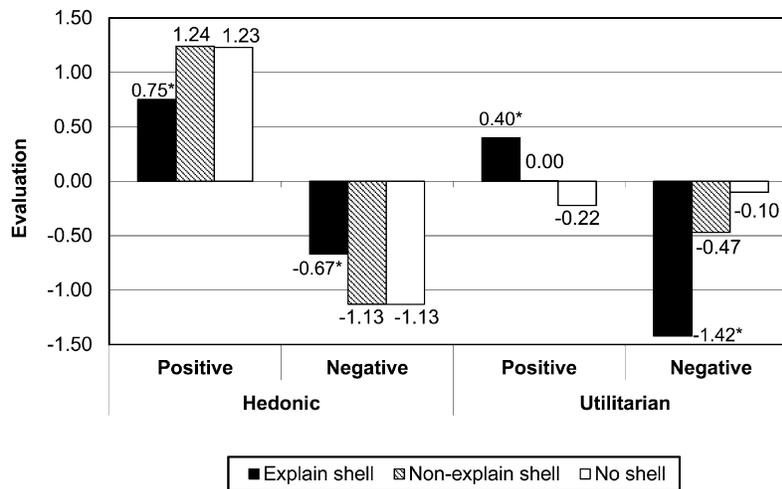
For positive dining experiences, participants in the explain story shell condition had less positive evaluations ( $M = 0.75$ ) than participants in the nonexplain story shell ( $M = 1.24$ ;  $F(1, 66) = 5.98$ ,  $p < .02$ ) and the no-writing control conditions ( $M = 1.23$ ;  $F(1, 66) = 4.65$ ,  $p < .04$ ), which did not differ from one another ( $F(1, 66) = 0.0$ ,  $p > .96$ ). Conversely, for negative dining experiences, participants in the explain story shell condition had less negative evaluations ( $M = -0.67$ ) than participants in the nonexplain story shell ( $M = -1.13$ ;  $F(1, 66) = 4.77$ ,  $p < .03$ ) and the no-writing control conditions ( $M = -1.13$ ;  $F(1, 66) = 3.95$ ,  $p < .05$ ), which did not differ from one another ( $F(1, 66) = 0.00$ ,  $p > .99$ ). There were no significant effects of valence or story shell on difficulty filling in the blanks (valence:  $F(1, 66) = 1.66$ ,  $p > .20$ ; story shell:  $F(1, 66) = 1.12$ ,  $p > .33$ ), and difficulty did not predict evaluations ( $F(1, 70) = 0.79$ ,  $p > .38$ ).

A model ( $F(5, 66) = 10.59$ ,  $p < .001$ ) using valence, story shell, and their interaction to predict retelling supported hypothesis 4. The model showed only a main effect of story shell ( $F(1, 66) = 2.95$ ,  $p < .05$ ), such that individuals were less likely to retell their story in the explain ( $M = -0.24$ ) compared to the control condition ( $M = 0.27$ ;  $F(1, 66) = 5.37$ ,  $p < .02$ ). The nonexplain condition ( $M = 0.05$ ) did not differ from the explain ( $F(1, 66) = 2.18$ ,  $p > .14$ ) or the control conditions ( $F(1, 66) = 1.07$ ,  $p > .30$ ).

**Discussion.** Study 3A demonstrated that explaining is a key process in altering consumers' evaluations of experiences; compared to those who told nonexplaining stories and to those who did not tell stories, only individuals who told explaining stories had dampened evaluations of their hedonic experiences. Those who told explaining stories were

FIGURE 3

EVALUATION BY VALENCE, EXPERIENCE TYPE, AND STORY SHELL: STUDIES 3A AND 3B



NOTE.—Means marked with an asterisk (\*) are significantly different from other means within that category.

also less likely to retell about their experience in the future. Further, this study's "mad libs" paradigm constrained individuals' language use, weakening alternative explanations that these findings are due to differences in the detail or consistency of stories rather than differences in explaining language. Study 3B uses the same "mad libs" paradigm to examine the impact of explaining language on utilitarian experiences.

### Study 3B: Utilitarian Experiences

As with study 3A, this study used a 2 (valence: positive or negative)  $\times$  3 (story shell: explain, nonexplain, or none) between-subjects design. However, participants recalled a recent utilitarian technology purchase instead of a hedonic dining experience. The story shells included information that was relevant for purchasing technology products—what product was purchased and where, the quality of customer service during the purchase, the product's features, and so forth. Again, the only difference between the explain and the nonexplain shells was the presence of explaining clauses in the former. As in study 2, individuals reported their evaluations of the experience, as well as their intentions to repeat, recommend, and retell about the experience. Further, understanding was measured in this study to assess its mediating impact on utilitarian experiences. Here, the use of explaining language in the explain shell condition should increase understanding compared to the other conditions. However, because of their cognitive basis, understanding utilitarian experiences should amplify, not dampen, individuals' evaluations.

*Method.* Seventy undergraduates participated for course credit. First, participants recalled either a positive or a negative utilitarian purchase; they were instructed "to think of a technology product you bought in order to accomplish a specific purpose or function." After recalling their purchase and reporting some initial evaluation measures, participants in the writing conditions completed either the explain or the non-explain story shell in the context of writing an online review. Participants in the control condition simply recalled a purchase without writing about it. Next, participants reported their evaluations of and intentions to repeat, recommend, and retell their experiences. Evaluations and intentions to repeat and recommend experiences were standardized and combined ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ); retelling did not load with these measures and was left as a standardized single item. Participants completed the understanding items from study 2 ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ), rated the difficulty of filling in the blanks in the story shells ( $r = 0.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and reported the price of the product and how frequently they used the product.

*Results.* A 2 (valence: positive or negative)  $\times$  3 (story shell: explain, nonexplain, or none) model significantly predicted final evaluations ( $F(5, 64) = 11.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and revealed only a valence by story shell interaction ( $F(2, 64) = 2.94$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Controlling for initial evaluations, purchase price, and frequency of product use did not influence these results.

Planned contrasts supported hypotheses 2a and 2b (fig. 2). For positive utilitarian experiences, explain shell individuals ( $M = 0.40$ ) had more positive evaluations than nonexplain shell ( $M = 0.004$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 3.30$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and control condition individuals ( $M = -0.22$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 7.50$ ,  $p < .008$ ).

Conversely, for negative utilitarian experiences, explain shell individuals ( $M = -1.42$ ) had marginally more negative evaluations than nonexplain shell individuals ( $M = -0.47$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 2.97$ ,  $p < .08$ ) and significantly more negative evaluations than control condition individuals ( $M = -0.10$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 4.77$ ,  $p < .03$ ).

Next, following Edwards and Lambert (2007), understanding was tested as a mediator of the relationship between the story shell manipulation and evaluations. As with study 2, the direct effect of the story shell manipulation on evaluations and the indirect effect of the story shell manipulation through understanding on evaluations are moderated by valence. Thus, the indirect effect of the understanding by story shell interaction was tested as a predictor of evaluations when controlling for the direct effect of the story shell by valence interaction on evaluations, which is significant, as demonstrated above. Supporting hypothesis 3, the understanding by valence interaction significantly predicted evaluations ( $\beta = 0.151$ ;  $t(69) = 1.46$ ,  $p < .05$ ) even when controlling for the story shell by valence interaction, which was no longer significant ( $\beta = -0.126$ ;  $t(69) = -0.87$ ,  $p > .19$ ). The mediation pathway was significant for positive and negative experiences ( $\beta_{\text{positive}} = -0.06$ ;  $\beta_{\text{negative}} = 0.075$ ,  $p < .05$ ); reversing the findings from studies 2, however, this pattern indicates that understanding positive utilitarian experiences increased evaluations and understanding negative utilitarian experiences decreased evaluations.

Finally, to test hypotheses 4 and 5, individuals' likelihood of retelling stories about their experience were examined. A model with valence, story shell, and their interaction was used to predict likelihood of retelling. The model ( $F(5, 64) = 7.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ) showed a main effect of valence ( $F(1, 64) = 5.47$ ,  $p < .02$ ), where individuals were more likely to retell positive ( $M = 0.18$ ) than negative experiences ( $M = -1.13$ ). Mirroring the evaluation findings, the model also showed a valence by story shell interaction ( $F(2, 64) = 4.18$ ,  $p < .02$ ). For negative experiences, individuals were less likely to retell their experiences in the explain shell condition ( $M = -2.07$ ) than in the control ( $M = -0.72$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 3.88$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the nonexplain shell conditions ( $M = -0.58$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 5.62$ ,  $p < .02$ ). For positive experiences, individuals were marginally more likely to retell their experiences in the explain shell condition ( $M = 0.46$ ) than the control ( $M = 0.04$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 2.52$ ,  $p < .10$ ) and the nonexplain shell conditions ( $M = 0.04$ ;  $F(1, 64) = 2.55$ ,  $p < .10$ ). Thus, hypothesis 4 was partially supported. Individuals were more likely to talk about positive utilitarian experiences after explaining, but they were less likely to talk about negative utilitarian experiences after explaining. Given this valence by story shell interaction, a path analysis was used to test hypothesis 5 about understanding as a mediator of these effects (Edwards and Lambert 2007). Corroborating the partial support for hypothesis 4, understanding mediated likelihood of retelling only for positive utilitarian experiences ( $\beta = -0.009$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

*Discussion.* Study 3B demonstrates that the effects of explaining language on evaluations obtained for hedonic experiences reverse for utilitarian experiences: due to their

cognitive nature (Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003), explaining why a utilitarian product was purchased or why it is liked increases evaluations of positive products and decreases evaluations of negative products. Hypothesis 4, that individuals are more likely to talk about utilitarian experiences they understand better, was partially supported: this relationship held only for positive experiences. Perhaps consumers feel that it is inappropriate to share very negative experiences unless they are requested to do so (Walker et al. 2009) or they are unwilling to tell stories about negative experiences for esteem reasons (Wojnicki and Godes 2008); these concerns may outweigh the desire to provide useful information to others.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current research addresses a critical but understudied issue in marketing: the impact of word of mouth on the storyteller. This article demonstrates that explaining language helps storytellers understand consumption experiences and that understanding influences storytellers' evaluations of experiences, as well as their intentions to repeat, recommend, and retell stories about experiences. Explaining language dampens evaluations of and intentions to repeat and recommend positive and negative hedonic experiences, but it polarizes evaluations of and intentions to repeat and recommend positive and negative utilitarian experiences. Further, explaining language decreases individuals' intentions to retell stories about positive and negative hedonic experiences, but it increases individuals' intentions to retell stories about positive utilitarian experiences. These findings highlight the importance of specific WOM content and demonstrate its impact on storytellers for different types of consumption experiences.

Past work shows that measuring the outward spread of WOM is essential (Godes and Mayzlin 2004). The current work suggests that firms should also consider how WOM influences the storyteller and balance the impact of WOM on the teller with its impact on the listener: while hearing positive WOM positively influences listeners' evaluations and intentions, sharing positive WOM can negatively affect storytellers' evaluations and intentions, and vice versa for negative WOM, depending on the language used and the type of experience in question. To manage these issues, firms could provide vocabularies or story schemas to consumers via advertising or design online review sites to help consumers express experiences in specific ways.

This work also has implications for consumers. It will allow them to manage their reactions to experiences. By knowing what to say and what to leave unsaid when sharing WOM, consumers can recover from negative hedonic experiences by explaining them and savor positive hedonic experiences by not explaining them, and vice versa for utilitarian experiences.

There are numerous avenues for research in this area. Future research could identify storyteller- or audience-related variables that influence the use of explaining language, such as expertise (West, Brown, and Hoch 1996) or goals in sharing

or listening (Dichter 1966). In addition, more specific content analyses or language manipulations could examine different types of explanations (Malle 2004) and their impact on understanding (Park 2010; Wilson and Gilbert 2008). Consistent with prior work (Taylor 1983), the current studies suggest that, on average, generating explanations increases understanding. However, explaining why something occurred might be less effective than explaining why something is liked or disliked, since consumers are likely more aware of their actions than their feelings prior to storytelling. Most importantly, while this article examined the influence of written, nontrad-

itional WOM on the storyteller, it is crucial to understand the influence of speaking and conversation on the storyteller. Although the medium of expression (written vs. spoken) should not differentially influence storytellers (Barton 1994), conversation, regardless of medium, should. That is, audience reactions and comments should influence storytellers' language use and evaluations: while a storyteller facing an argumentative audience might increase their use of explaining language, a storyteller facing an enthusiastic audience might decrease their use of explaining language, with corresponding effects on evaluations and intentions.

## APPENDIX

FIGURE A1

### STORY SHELLS FROM STUDY 3A

#### Nonexplain Shell

Last \_\_\_\_\_, I had a \_\_\_\_\_, dining experience while I was at \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_. I was there with \_\_\_\_\_. Overall, I was really \_\_\_\_\_ with the experience—it was \_\_\_\_\_. I ordered \_\_\_\_\_ which was \_\_\_\_\_. The food smelled \_\_\_\_\_ and tasted \_\_\_\_\_. My meal was \_\_\_\_\_. I'd say the service was \_\_\_\_\_, and I felt \_\_\_\_\_. The atmosphere was also \_\_\_\_\_—I'd describe it as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The best [worst] part of the whole experience was \_\_\_\_\_. During the experience, I felt \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. I would \_\_\_\_\_ recommend this experience to others, it was \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Explain Shell

Last \_\_\_\_\_, I had a \_\_\_\_\_ dining experience while I was at \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_. I was there with \_\_\_\_\_ and we went because \_\_\_\_\_. Overall, I was really \_\_\_\_\_ with the experience—it was \_\_\_\_\_ especially because \_\_\_\_\_. I ordered \_\_\_\_\_, which was \_\_\_\_\_. The food smelled \_\_\_\_\_ and tasted \_\_\_\_\_. My meal was \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. I'd say the service was \_\_\_\_\_ and I felt \_\_\_\_\_ since \_\_\_\_\_. The atmosphere was also \_\_\_\_\_—I'd describe it as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. The best [worst] part of the whole experience was \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_. During the experience, I felt \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ since \_\_\_\_\_. This experience helped me realize that \_\_\_\_\_, since \_\_\_\_\_. I would \_\_\_\_\_ recommend this experience to others, because \_\_\_\_\_.

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