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I think, therefore I ignore: a study on disinformation's credibility perceptions and sharing intentions over social media

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the influence that bandwagon heuristics (conceptualized as the number of likes and comments' valence) and actively open-minded thinking (AOT) have on the credibility and sharing of disinformation over social media. Across two experimental studies, Study 1 finds a direct link between the sharing intention of social media posts containing disinformation and an interactive effect of AOT on such bandwagon heuristics. Study 2 demonstrates that for posts containing disinformation, the number of likes has a significant influence on sharing intentions, but not credibility, whilst comments have a significant influence on credibility, but not sharing intentions. Furthermore, Study 2 found the influence of AOT attenuates the effects of such heuristics. Overall, this research contributes to the extant literature and practice by demonstrating the influence bandwagon heuristics and AOT have on disinformation over social media. This paper further presents areas of future research to improve the understanding of how disinformation spreads.

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Social media; bandwagon heuristics; credibility; sharing intentions; disinformation; Actively open-minded thinking (AOT)

1. Introduction

With the advent of social media, individuals, rather than corporations, have become the creators and sharers of information and content (Bu et al., 2022; Ferm & Thaichon, 2021a, 2021b). However, in recent years, the sharing of content has become a cause for concern due to the lack of a 'gatekeeper' who monitors and blocks deliberately inaccurate or false information (i.e. disinformation) from being posted or shared (Lin et al., 2016). The sharing of disinformation is unavoidable with the incredible amount of data generated by social media users per day (Marr, 2022; Zadeh et al., 2019), and it is impossible to prevent users from being exposed to disinformation (Lin & Spence, 2019).

Social media disinformation is increasing due to lower barriers to entry in the media industry and the ease of monetizing content (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). However, individuals are cognitively passive on social media and use bandwagon heuristics (such as likes and comments) to determine the credibility and shareability of social media

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content (Mena et al., 2020; Sundar, 2008). Yet, this leads to the spread of disinformation as individuals are often distracted or lazy (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). For example, disinformation about COVID-19 vaccines spread because of such heuristics, leading to reduced vaccination rates with 44% fearing side effects (Domenico et al., 2021; Marco-Franco et al., 2021). A nuanced view of heuristics is needed to understand why people spread disinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

Whilst researchers have investigated the sharing and credibility of disinformation through the lens of fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bronstein et al., 2019; Lazer et al., 2018), lesser research has investigated the disinformation of false product benefits. This is surprising as it is a highly common issue. For example, a viral video containing disinformation stated that tampons cause cancer, which medical professionals state is false (Healthline, 2022). Additionally, companies previously fined for false advertising had their purchases decrease, but these effects did not spillover to competing firms (Rao, 2022). As a result, even when disinformation is proven, customers often continue purchasing and believing such disinformation. So, whilst disinformation has been investigated, factors that mitigate its effectiveness need further clarification (Colliander, 2019).

This paper will explore the relationship between heuristics (likes and comments) and cognitive analytical thinking as drivers of greater (vs lesser) amounts of disinformation sharing (e.g. Colliander, 2019). We propose that bandwagon heuristics increase the credibility and sharing of disinformation (Mena et al., 2020), but the effect of these heuristics are attenuated in the presence of greater actively open-minded thinking (AOT) (Bronstein et al., 2019). As a result, this paper is guided by the following research question: *to what extent does AOT influence bandwagon heuristics impact on the credibility and sharing intention of disinformation across social media?*

This paper's contribution is threefold. First, this paper adds to extant literature by empirically determining the mechanisms and key factors that spread disinformation. Whilst research has uncovered the effects of disinformations spread (Rao, 2022), its mitigating factors need further attention. Second, recent research demonstrates the effects of bandwagon heuristics on credibility and sharing intentions (Kim, 2018; Lin & Spence, 2019; Mena et al., 2020), we join this conservation of important research by establishing similar effects through false product information. Third, we contribute to practice by uncovering how particular heuristics impact perceived credibility and sharing intentions of social media product advertising.

2. Background and theoretical development

2.1 Bandwagon heuristics

When using social media, individuals often use cognitive shortcuts to process information (Mena et al., 2020). These cognitive shortcuts are termed 'bandwagon heuristics' and can be thought of as individuals thinking '*if others think that this is [. . .] good, then I should think so too*' (Sundar, 2008, p. 83). More specifically, the bandwagon heuristic posits that the more something receives positive feedback, the more credible it is and requires less cognitive resources to understand (Mena et al., 2020). A common example of this heuristic is feedback on e-commerce platforms (e.g. Amazon or eBay) to determine product quality (Fu et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2016).

Research into bandwagon heuristics has flourished in a social media context. For example, bandwagon heuristics can explain opinion formations over social media (Lee et al., 2018). Further, social media with a high (vs low) amount of likes is perceived as more credible (Kim, 2018). In the face of such results, the number of likes or valence of comments received on social media content also builds its credibility (Colliander, 2019; Kim, 2018). This effect has been found to increase word-of-mouth, purchase intentions overall (Anantharaman et al., 2022; Smith, 2011) and in the luxury market (Dhaliwal et al., 2020). As such, bandwagon heuristics influence customers' evaluation of a message and promotes an individual to 'jump on the bandwagon' (Lim et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, we believe disinformative posts containing high (vs low) likes or positive (vs negative comments) will increase the content's credibility and likelihood of being shared. Whilst research has investigated the effect of bandwagon heuristics in the face of celebrity endorsements (Mena et al., 2020), health information (Borah & Xiao, 2018) or opinion formations (Lee et al., 2018), lesser research has been conducted on the bandwagon effect on false product information over social media. To address this gap, this study will draw on bandwagon heuristics to understand how, even in the face of disinformation, the influence of heuristic cues impact the credibility and sharing of disinformation.

2.2 Credibility and sharing intention

Whilst traditional media gatekeeps credibility through editors, social media shifts credibility checks to consumers (Lin et al., 2016). Indeed, traditional media is perceived as less credible than online sources of information (Hajli et al., 2015). Therefore, the use of cognitive shortcuts and heuristics are used to determine credibility over social media (Mena et al., 2020). We view credibility as '*the judgments made by a perceiver (e.g. a message recipient) concerning the believability of a communicator*' (O'keefe, 2015, p. 291).

Research shows individuals rely on non-source cues to determine content's credibility and sharing propensity – such as likes and comments (Mena et al., 2020). If a piece of content has a large number of likes or positive comments, its credibility, and likelihood of being shared, increase (Ferm & Thaichon, 2021a; Lee et al., 2018). Whilst this is particularly the case in 'fake news' (Bastick, 2021; Lazer et al., 2018), sparse research has illustrated the credibility and sharing of false product benefits over social media. For example, whilst false advertising is regulated through entities such as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), disinformations spread remains difficult to regulate due to personalization algorithms and filter bubbles (Resnick, 2017).

With regards to this study, we build on prior work (e.g. Mena et al., 2020) and posit that perceptions of credibility and propensity to share disinformation will increase based on the likes/comments of the content. For example, Colliander (2019) found individuals are less likely to share disinformative content in the presence of negative comments. Further, social medias algorithms repeatedly expose users to potential disinformation (Resnick, 2017) which can increase its credibility perceptions and sharing intentions (Pillai & Fazio, 2021). We posit that bandwagon heuristics (e.g. likes and comments) will influence contents sharing intentions and credibility, even in the face of disinformation. As a result, the following is proposed:

H1: Disinformation's (a) sharing intention and (b) credibility is influenced in the presence of bandwagon heuristics such as comments and likes.

2.3 Actively open-minded thinking (moderator)

AOT captures the differences in using evidence (e.g. social media likes, comments, or others' opinions) when forming and revising beliefs, with lower levels of AOT associated with greater belief in disinformation (Bronstein et al., 2019). AOT is a susceptibility to belief bias where individuals have a reduced capacity to separate prior knowledge from reasoning processes (Haran et al., 2013). Specifically, those high on AOT are considered to be more reflective whilst those low on AOT put less effort into their thinking and display less rationality (Svedholm-Häkkinen & Lindeman, 2018).

AOT provides a standard for cognitive determinations and evaluative thinking and reasoning (Baron, 2019). AOT has been used to understand individuals' belief in fake news and had a direct negative effect on reducing belief in fake news as perceived (Bronstein et al., 2019). Further, individuals high in AOT were found to be intellectually curious and better at interpreting and arriving at correct conclusions regarding social media content (Carpenter et al., 2018). AOT serves as an antithesis to information overload and may help overcome inattentive, bandwagon heuristic-driven behaviors as commonly proposed in extant social media literature (Carpenter et al., 2018; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). As a result, we propose that AOT will attenuate the effect of bandwagon heuristics (such as comments and likes) on credibility and sharing intentions. Formally, we propose:

H2: AOT will have an interaction effect with and attenuate the effect of bandwagon heuristics for (a) sharing intentions and (b) credibility of disinformation.

3. Overview of studies

The conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1 and shows the relationship between bandwagon heuristics and the sharing intention of disinformation, as moderated by AOT and mediated by post credibility. We test our predictions via two experimental studies, across varying product categories and participant populations as such an approach could establish causality for our predictions (Japutra et al., 2022). We use two different products that have been proven false in prior research (Rao & Wang, 2017) (a flu

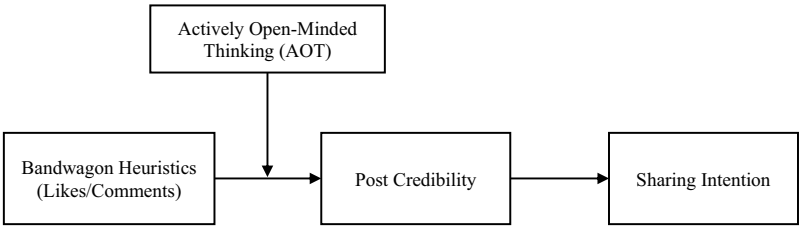


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

supplement in Study 1, yogurt in Study 2). The use of demonstrated false product benefits was done to provide greater external validity and to offer empirical evidence for our predictions. Study 1 seeks to understand Hypothesis H1a and H2a via a two-way ANOVA. For Study 2, we test our conceptual model and H1a, H1b, H2a, and H2b via a moderated mediation analysis.

In all studies, we recruited our participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk workers have been proven to be highly attentive, efficient and provide high quality data (Hauser & Schwarz, 2016; Kees et al., 2017). In line with prior research, we used the following criteria for recruitment (1) participants are located in the USA, and (2) participants have a HIT approval rating greater than or equal to 95% (Kim, 2018).

3.1 Study 1

Study 1 sought to provide evidence for H1a and H2a. First, by predicting bandwagon heuristics' effect on sharing intentions. Second, by predicting AOT's interactive effect on the extent that a post that contains disinformation is perceived. The studies stimuli is a social media post containing a dietry supplement which is said to prevent colds entirely – a disinformative claim the FTC stated was false and issued a consent order to the company to stop (Rao & Wang, 2017).

3.1.1 Methods

Participants and design. We recruited 198 participants from the U.S. (41.9% female) aged 18 years or older via Amazon MTurk. Participants met the following criteria: (1) Be aged above 18 years of age (2) Frequent users of social media platforms, and (3) often share/forward social media content. This study employed a 2 (negative vs positive comments) x 2 (high likes vs low likes) between-subjects research design.

Procedure. Participants were asked to evaluate a mock-up Instagram post for cold treatments. The caption indicated that a natural cold remedy can cure or stop colds before they happen 'The team @fluaway has an amazing dietary supplement that is guaranteed to fight colds and if taken at the first sign of a cold, its natural formulation is proven to prevent them'. As per Rao and Wang (2017), this is a false claim and was chosen as source of disinformation. Likes were manipulated to be high (28,594) or low (28) and for comments, we adapted comment structures from Colliander (2019) for the negative (e.g. 'These are false benefits!') and positive conditions (e.g. 'What amazing benefits! I can't wait to try'.).

Participants indicated their sharing intention of the post via 3 items from Wei and Lu (2013) ($\alpha = .83$). Then, participants completed the 8-item AOT scale ($\alpha = .90$) from Bronstein et al. (2019) (Appendix B). AOT scores were summed after reverse scoring where higher scores reflect a higher propensity to revise beliefs and consideration of alternatives (Bronstein et al., 2019)

3.1.2 Results and Discussion

Sharing Intentions. We conducted a two-way ANOVA with likes, comments, AOT and their interaction as independent variables, and sharing intention as the dependent variable. Results revealed a significant main effect of AOT ($F(18, 143) = 4.575$, $p < .001$,

Table 1. Two-way ANOVA (Study 1).

Sharing Intention (Y)						
	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*	η_p^2
Corrected Model	110.772[a]	54	2.051	2.586	<0.001***	0.494
Intercept	2462.188	1	2462.188	3103.917	<0.001***	0.956
AOT (X)	65.328	18	3.629	4.575	<0.001***	0.365
Likes (X1)	3.950	1	3.950	4.979	0.027*	0.034
Comments (X2)	1.067	1	1.067	1.345	0.248	0.009
X × X1	22.428	14	1.602	2.019	0.020*	0.165
X × X2	17.254	13	1.327	1.673	0.073	0.132
X1 × X2	0.177	1	0.177	0.223	0.637	0.002
X × X1 × X2	2.714	6	0.452	0.570	0.754	0.023
Error	113.435	143	0.793			

*** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; AOT = Actively Open-Minded Thinking.

$\eta_p^2 = .365$) and likes ($F(1, 143) = 4.979$, $p = .027$) but non-significant main effects of comments ($F(1, 143) = .1.345$, $p = .248$) (Table 1). In the likes condition, individuals reported significantly higher sharing intentions of posts with high likes ($M_{high} = 5.557$, $M_{low} = 5.063$, $p = .003$). However, no significant differences between the comments and sharing intentions were found ($M_{positive} = 5.416$, $M_{negative} = 5.207$, $p = .207$).

Further, the interactions of AOT and likes were significant ($F(14, 143) = 2.019$, $p = <.$ .020, $\eta_p^2 = .165$) and marginally significant for AOT and comments ($F(13, 143) = 1.673$), $p = .073$, $\eta_p^2 = .132$). This provides support for H2a where the interaction of AOT and bandwagon heuristics influences the sharing intentions of disinformation.

In Study 1, AOT had a significant interaction effect between the likes and comments of a post containing disinformation's sharing intention. The interaction of AOT, likes and comments support H2a. However, comments lack of direct effect of on sharing intention runs counter to Colliander (2019). In our study, variables such as product interest may play a role in this and so, to provide stronger empirical evidence, Study 2 will use a different product category.

3.2 Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was twofold. First, we utilized a different product category where, similar to Study 1, a yogurt brand (Dannon) was issued a consent order by the FTC to cease making unsubstantiated claims that its product prevented colds and flu in addition to improving regularity (Rao & Wang, 2017). As such, this context was chosen due to its potential to increase external validity. Second, and most importantly, this study will test the effects of bandwagon heuristics, AOT and their influence on the credibility and sharing intention of disinformation. This study will investigate hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2a and H2b and validate the conceptual model.

3.2.1 Methods

Participants and design. We recruited 251 participants from the U.S. (36.6% female) aged 18 years or older via MTurk. As in Study 1, participants were to meet the following criteria (1) be aged above 18 years of age, (2) are frequent users of social media platforms, and (3) often share/forward social media content. This study employed a 2 (negative vs positive comments) x 2 (high likes vs low likes) between-subjects research design.

Procedure. This study employed similar materials and procedures to Study 1 where the posts likes and comments were the same. However, this study used a yoghurt context due to its proven unsubstantiated claim in literature and practice (Rao & Wang, 2017). Building on this false claim, the caption indicated that a natural cold remedy could cure or stop colds before they happen 'Thanks to the team @yougogurt, my irregularity has improved, and their yoghurts special formula helps prevent cold's and flu's before they happen!' (Appendix A).

Participants indicated their perceived credibility of the post via 3 items from Martínez-López et al. (2020) (α = .85) and their intention to share the post with their friends/over social media via 3 items from Wei and Lu (2013) (α = .88). Participants then completed the 8-item AOT scale (α = .95) from Bronstein et al. (2019).

3.2.2 Results and Discussion

Moderated Mediation Analyses. To further explore the interaction effect, a moderated mediation analysis was conducted using Model 8 (Hayes, 2017). We tested the effects of likes and comments, as moderated by AOT, on sharing intentions via credibility. Results uncovered a significant index of moderated mediation ($B = -.021$, $SE = .010$, 90% CI [−.039, −.006]) in the comment condition and a negative indirect effect of comments on sharing intentions via credibility ($B = .124$, $SE = .070$, 90% CI [−.245, −.017]) in the high AOT category (+1SD) (Figure 2). A non-significant index of moderated mediation was found in the likes condition ($B = -.008$, $SE = .010$, 90% CI [−.025, .007]). These results are summarised in Table 2 and provide evidence for our theoretical model and hypotheses (H1a, H1b, H2a and H2b).

We applied the Johnson – Neyman procedure to identify regions of significance. In the comment condition, there was a significant effect of AOT on credibility where as AOT levels increased (from 32.080 and above), the perceived credibility of a post containing disinformation decreased. Similarly, for the like conditions, there was a significant effect of AOT on sharing intentions where, as AOT levels increased (from 31.284 and above), the sharing intention of posts containing disinformation decreased. These results are shown in Figure 3.

4. Discussion

Across two experiments examining the effect of disinformation of product benefits on social media, we examined how bandwagon heuristics such as high (vs low) likes and positive (vs negative) comments can influence the sharing and credibility of disinformation. Notably, we utilized AOT to demonstrate individuals' capabilities to disregard the effect of these heuristics. This research demonstrated the stronger effect of likes on sharing intentions than whereas comments had a stronger effect on credibility and also displayed a moderated mediating effect.

Overall, we provide evidence for our conceptual model and hypotheses across two studies. The studies reveal that particular heuristic cues are more effective at determining credibility and others for sharing intentions. Our results are built from prior multidisciplinary research (e.g. Bronstein et al., 2019; Mena et al., 2020; Rao, 2022) and generated novel insights on the effects of particular social media engagement metrics and their influence. The results provide a series of important implications.

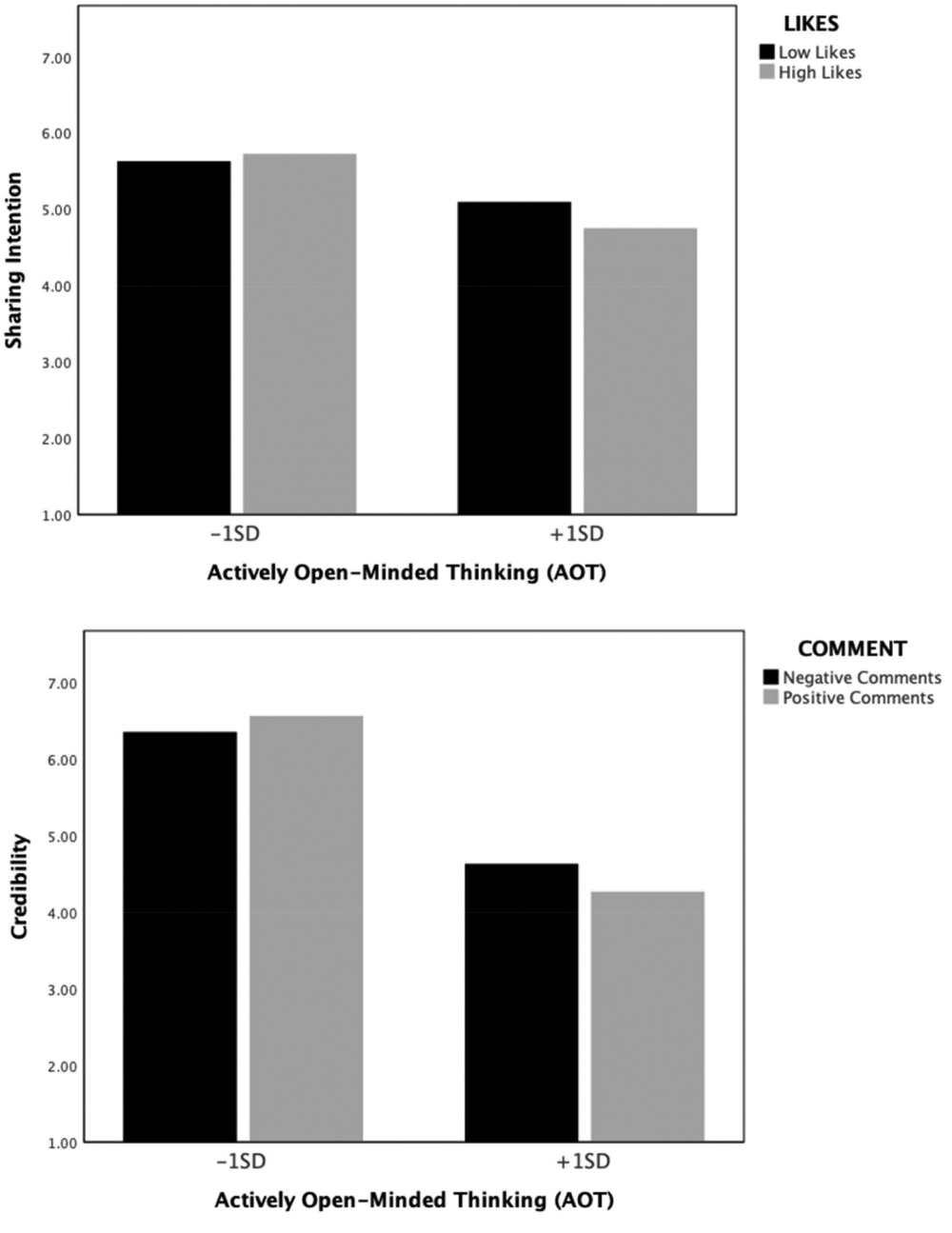


Figure 2. Comments, Likes and AOTs effect on Credibility and Sharing Intentions.

4.1 Theoretical contributions

This research makes several contributions to the literature. First, we disconfirmed prior research by finding that comments do not influence sharing intentions as found by Colliander (2019). Rather, comments had a significant effect on the perceived credibility of disinformation. Our work demonstrated that likes had a significant direct effect on

Table 2. Moderated mediation Analyses (Study 2).

	Credibility (M)				Sharing Intentions (Y)			
	Coeff	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	11.875	.382	31.055	<.001***	4.104	.663	6.186	<.001***
Likes (X)	.254	.382	.663	.508	.660	.300	2.203	.029*
AOT (W)	−.214	.013	−16.990	<.001***	−.082	.015	−5.663	<.001***
Credibility (M)	-	-	-	-	.673	.050	−5.663	<.001***
X × W	−.011	.013	−.885	.377	−.024	.010	−2.432	.016*
Model Summary	R^2 = .543, $F(3, 247)$ = 97.834, p = <.001***				R^2 = .749, $F(4, 246)$ = 183.322, p = <.001***			
	Credibility (M)				Sharing Intentions (Y)			
	Coeff	*SE*	*t*	*p*	Coeff	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	12.037	.384	31.347	<.001***	3.966	.687	5.775	<.001***
Comments (X)	.900	.384	2.345	.020*	−.045	.311	−.144	.885
AOT (W)	−.220	.013	−17.347	<.001***	−.080	.015	−5.314	<.001***
Credibility (M)	-	-	-	-	.687	.051	13.465	<.001***
X × W	−.031	.013	−2.471	.014*	.001	.010	.142	.887
Model Summary	R^2 = .550, $F(3, 247)$ = 100.560, p = <.001***				R^2 = .741, $F(4, 246)$ = 175.902, p = <.001***			

*** = $p \leq .001$; ** = $p \leq .01$; * = $p \leq .05$; AOT = Actively Open-Minded Thinking.

sharing intentions, across both studies, as well as significant interaction effects with AOT. These results are interesting as they imply that individuals heuristically build the credibility of posts via comments and its sharing intentions via the amount of likes. It may be assumed that comments are viewed by individuals as more 'effortful' and more reliable in determining credibility. Further, the amount of likes may inform a type of 'conformity' effect where the consensus of others has an influence on sharing intentions.

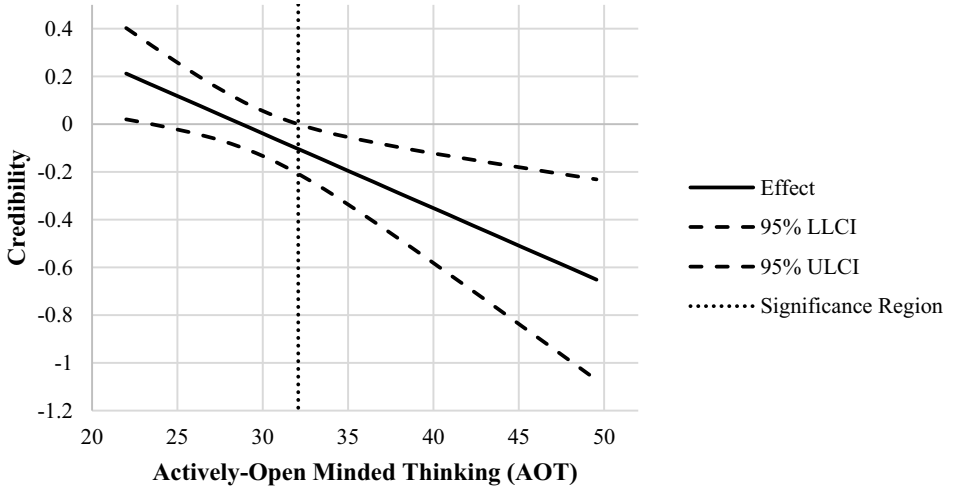
Second, AOT's influencer on bandwagon heuristics proved fruitful as those scoring higher on AOT were less influenced by likes and comments on disinformative content. The results align with Bronstein et al. (2019) who found AOT had a significant negative effect on belief in disinformation – which we found attenuated the bandwagon heuristics influence on credibility and sharing intentions. Importantly, this study also confirms the findings of Carpenter et al. (2018) where individuals scoring higher on AOT were less focused on bandwagon heuristics, thus leading to negative moderating effects.

Third, we extend the work of Rao (2022) and find that even when a product category has been prosecuted for disinformation, customers credibility perceptions and sharing intentions remain. Filter algorithims that display a stream of similar content to individuals work as a form of repeated exposure (Pillai & Fazio, 2021). However, whilst previous studies have illustrated the dangers of disinformation on social media (e.g. Rao & Wang, 2017), this study was one of the first to inject persuasion literature and the construct of AOT to misleading product claims (see Pennycook & Rand, 2019). As a result, this study fills a meaningful gap where bandwagon heuristics can be overcome by an individuals analytical thinking and opens new opportunities for future study.

4.2 Managerial & policy contributions

These results provide value for marketing practitioners and policy makers in the following manner. First, the knowledge that comments build credibility and likes build sharing intentions indicates potential marketing campaigns at differing stages of product

(a) Comments



(b) Likes

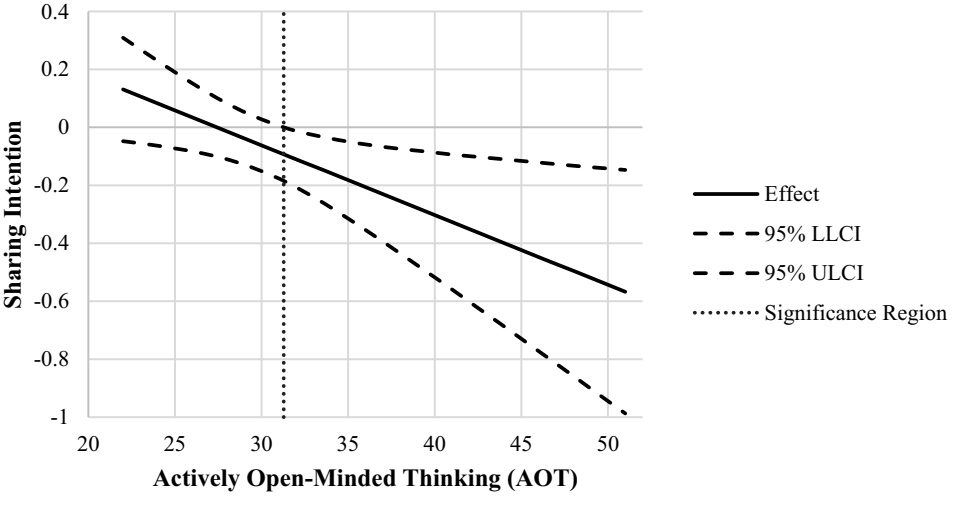


Figure 3. Johnson-Neyman interaction Plots. *Note*: LLCI = Lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = Upper limit confidence interval

lifecycles (e.g. encouraging comments in the introduction or growth phases to build credibility) or customer journey mapping (e.g. focusing on liking for post-purchase touchpoints) (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Splitting up such metrics may help practitioners focus on their campaigns and marketing strategies.

Second, our insights into the moderating role of AOT show that individuals are prone to perceiving disinformative posts negatively (Baron, 2019). Practitioners must be certain to determine the truthfulness of their content as those higher in AOT are found to be more visible and respected on social media (Carpenter et al., 2018). Practioners of

industries plagued with false claims (e.g. gym supplements or health foods) (Rao, 2022) may wish to avoid campaigns that require the use of metrics by customers (e.g. comment to win a prize) in favour of others forms of engagement (e.g. brand awareness videos with no explicit sales motive) (Ferm & Thaichon, 2021b; Hirose, 2022).

Third, disinformation is a concern in politics (Bronstein et al., 2019) and marketing (Rao, 2022), and when policy makers release difficult information (e.g. COVID-19 vaccines) it may be met with resistance. Therefore, for false product disinformation which has experienced repeated exposure (Resnick, 2017), policy makers and governments should ensure offenders use repeated retractions to correct the falsehood (Ecker et al., 2020; Lewandowsky et al., 2012). However, this must (1) not oversaturate the messages, and (2) ensure that these messages are from the offenders social media account. Also, authority sources (such as the FTC) can help stop false product claims from spreading, even in the face of bandwagon heuristics (Lin et al., 2016).

4.3 Limitations and future research

We acknowledge the limitations of this research; however, these limitations also represent future research opportunities. First, whilst we do provide ample evidence for our hypotheses, mediating effects were not a predominant focus of this study and were not hypothesized. As mediating effects were found in the comment conditions, future research may wish to explore this area by including mediating factors such as conformity (Colliander, 2019) or trustworthiness (Wijenayake et al., 2021). Third, the results indicating that comments influence credibility and likes influence sharing intention, but not vice versa, require further testing in other product contexts as it would be of interest to understand if these results carry over in differing product categories or industries. Fourth, the inclusion of different product contexts or experiments of disinformation within service encounters (in person or online) would be significant, particularly as it relates to AOT. Lastly, the influence of information sources (such as influencers) would pertinent to study further. As potential sources of credibility, social media influencers act as another form of heuristic – investigating the effects of social media influencer types (e.g. mega vs micro) would present interesting insights.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this research found that bandwagon heuristics influence the sharing intention and credibility of posts containing disinformation. The effects of likes are significant for sharing intentions and comments for credibility. AOT negatively moderates this effect where those scoring higher on AOT have negative views of disinformation, even in the presence of bandwagon heuristics. We encourage future researchers to build on these findings and investigate other mediating factors and heuristics (i.e. influencers) to deepen this fruitful and needed area of study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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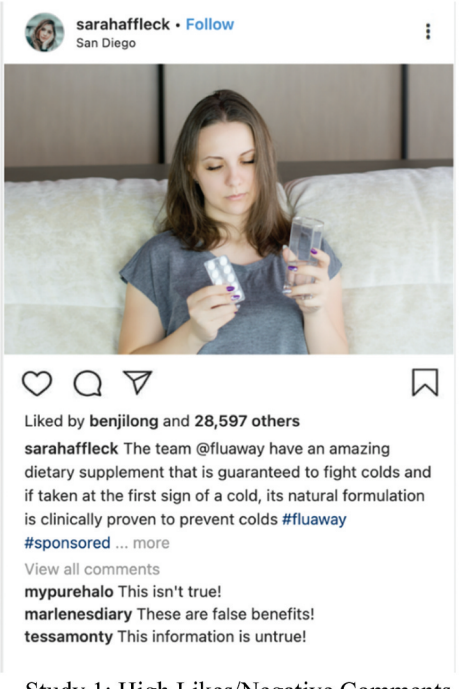
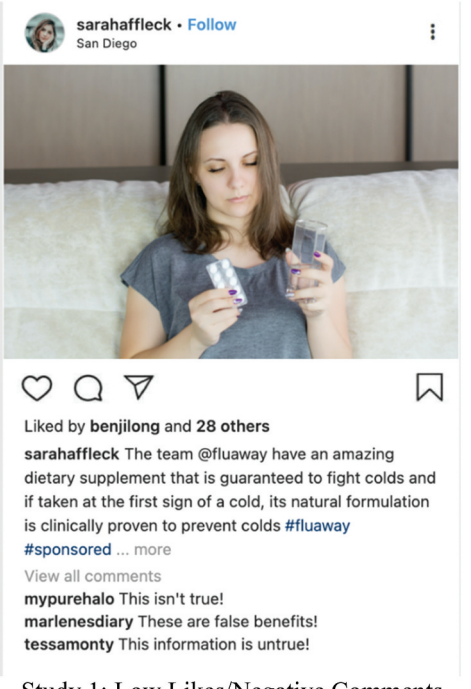
Appendix A: Study Stimuli

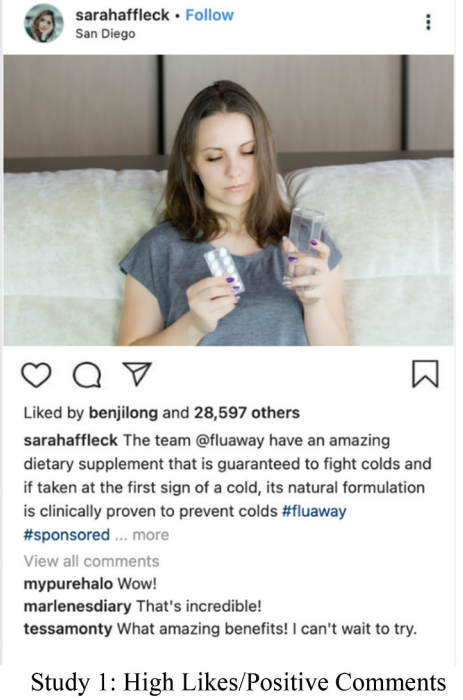
Study 1 Stimuli



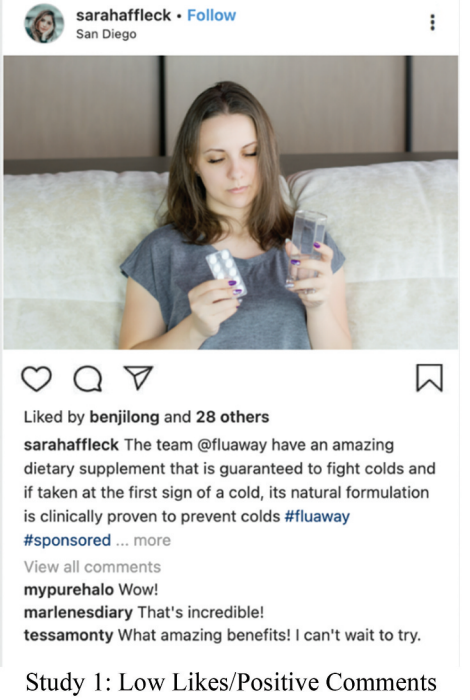
Study 1: High Likes/Negative Comments



Study 1: Low Likes/Negative Comments



Study 1: High Likes/Positive Comments



Study 1: Low Likes/Positive Comments

Study 2 Stimuli

Study 2: High Likes/Negative Comments

Study 2: Low Likes/Negative Comments

Study 2: High Likes/Positive Comments

Study 1: Low Likes/Positive Comments

Appendix B: Scales

Actively Open-Minded Thinking (AOT) (adapted from Bronstein et al. (2019) | 1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree
1. A person should always consider new possibilities
2. People should always take into consideration evidence that goes against their beliefs
3. It is important to persevere in your beliefs even when evidence is brought to bear against them (R)
4. Certain beliefs are just too important to abandon no matter how good a case can be made against them (R)
5. One should disregard evidence that conflicts with your established beliefs (R)
6. Beliefs should always be revised in response to new information or evidence
7. No one can talk me out of something I know is right (R)
8. I believe that loyalty to one's ideals and principles is more important than 'open-mindedness' (R)
Post Credibility (adapted from Martínez-López et al., 2020) | 1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree
This post is:
1. Not reliable – Reliable
2. Not credible – Credible
3. Not believable – Believable
Sharing Intentions (adapted from Wei & Lu, 2013) | 1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree
1. I think I will forward this content to my friends.
2. I think I will share this content with my friends.
3. I think I will share this content with others on the internet

(R) = Reverse-Coded