MANAGING BUZZ

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Abstract

We model the incentives of individuals to engage in word of mouth (or buzz) about a product, and how a firm may strategically influence this process through its information release and advertising strategies. Individuals receive utility by improving how others perceive them. A firm restricts access to information; advertising may crowd out word of mouth, and a credible commitment not to engage in advertising is valuable for a firm.

Keywords: Buzz, word of mouth, self-enhancement, signaling, advertising, diffusion.

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1 Introduction

Word of mouth is an important driver of consumers’ purchase decisions. However, despite its importance, the existing literature typically treats word of mouth as a costless and mechanical process and offers little insight into an individual’s incentive to engage in word of mouth. In this paper, we introduce a framework to model how consumers’ concerns about social status drive their incentives to engage in word of mouth. We focus on a particular reputational motive – word of mouth as “self-enhancement” (Baumeister, 1998) or the idea that an individual engages in word of mouth to improve how she is perceived by the listener. In contrast to a setting where consumers mechanically undertake word of mouth, we show that a firm may improve the incentives for individuals to engage in word of mouth by restricting early access to product information.

As a real-life illustration of our finding that firms may benefit from actively restricting early access to product information, consider the US launch of the European music streaming site Spotify in July of 2011. At first, Spotify’s free US version was available by invitation only. Interestingly, obtaining the invitation was non-trivial, and direct invitations were limited to certain groups: consumers could receive one either through current users or through other channels. For example, the company sent invitations to users who interacted with Spotify on Twitter, and Coca Cola gave out invitations to users who submitted their email address. After a few weeks, anyone could download the free version of Spotify through the company’s website. By November 2011, Spotify was able to attract 4 million users, while undertaking almost no advertising. Media sources speculated that the initial exclusivity surrounding the site contributed to early buzz and high adoption rates.

The Spotify example is by no means unique. Many marketing practitioners recommend and use similar strategies which limit access to information in order to spur word of mouth. For example, Hughes (2005) states, “Sometimes withholding can work better than flooding. Limit supply and everybody’s interested. Limit those in the know of a secret, those not in the know want the currency

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1 Word of mouth has been shown to affect purchasing behavior in restaurant choices (Luca, 2013), book sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006), banking (Keaveney, 1995), entertainment (Chintagunta et al., 2010), technological products (Herr et al., 1991), and appliances and clothing (Richins, 1983). These studies are also consistent with recent industry research: for example, according to World of Mouth Marketing Association (2011), 54% of purchase decisions are influenced by word of mouth. Also, “Word of mouth is the primary factor behind 20 to 50 percent of all purchase decisions” in McKinsey Quarterly (Bughin et al., 2010), and “word of mouth remains the biggest influence in people’s electronics (43.7%) and apparel (33.6%) purchases,” National Retail Federation (2009).


3 One possible reason for a firm’s initial limited release could be a beta version of the product in a test market for the purposes of collecting feedback from users about the product’s functionality before its wide release. This explanation is less applicable to the Spotify case, given its presence and operational volume in Europe by the time it launched in the US market in 2011 – Spotify had already become the most popular such service in the world and it had 1.6 million paid subscribers and more than 10 million registered users in total (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/14/technology/spotify-music-streaming-service-comes-to-us.html).


5 See, for example, “Spotify’s ascension can be largely attributed to word of mouth” (http://www.theverge.com/2013/3/25/4145146/spotify-kicks-off-ad-blitz-as-rumors-hint-of-video-service).
of knowing - they want to be part of the exclusive circle.” David Balter, the founder of the buzz marketing firm BzzAgent, considers exclusivity to be one of the necessary ingredients for a successful word of mouth campaign. “Exclusivity is the velvet rope of social media: everyone wants to be special enough to be on the right side of it.” Our model explains why \textit{purposely} limiting the number of people who are initially exposed to product information may in fact maximize overall product adoption.

We develop a model where consumers meet one another at a Poisson rate over time. The key element of the model is that the utility an individual receives during a social interaction is an increasing function of her peer’s belief that she is the high type. The most straightforward interpretation of high type here is being knowledgeable about a particular product area or having category expertise: for example, having good taste in wine, being technologically savvy, knowing the best restaurants and bars, or having good taste in music. Prior to meeting others, individuals choose whether or not to undertake a search to acquire information about the firm’s product at a certain individual-specific cost. Then, during each social interaction, individuals decide whether or not to engage in costly word of mouth. We focus on a signaling equilibrium where word of mouth serves as a credible signal of high type. The central focus of our analysis is how the firm can manage the extent of the information diffusion in this context.

We broadly consider two types of strategies by the firm. First, we consider information release strategies where the firm imposes differential costs for information acquisition on different types of consumers. When the costs of acquiring information for the low type are high enough, there exists a signaling equilibrium where individuals acquire information and then pass it on through word of mouth to people they meet. As information diffuses in the population, and low social types acquire information through word of mouth, the signaling value of the information becomes diluted, and diffusion stops when the signaling value is equal to the cost of engaging in word of mouth. Hence, the firm can influence the extent of the diffusion by manipulating the asymmetry in the cost of acquiring information across different groups of consumers. The optimal information release strategy of the firm is to maximally increase the costs of the low type and minimize the costs of the high type. This enables us to explain why exclusivity strategies by a firm that restrict (in particular ways) who has access to information about the product may in fact increase the total amount of information that is shared in the population.

Second, we introduce advertising\textsuperscript{8} by the firm and consider how the amount of advertising affects

\textsuperscript{6}http://blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/6183/4-Social-Media-Methods-for-Generating-Word-of-Mouth.aspx

\textsuperscript{7}Also, Sernovitz (2011) observes that “Many people are more likely to talk about a product if there is some kind of insider access or privileged status” and provides a number of examples where firms use exclusivity strategy to increase word of mouth about their products. For instance, retailers sometimes offer private shopping hours for their select customers the night before new products are available to the public, and software companies send \textit{prerelease} versions of software to active message board users.

\textsuperscript{8}There are several different perspectives on advertising, such as the informative, persuasive and the complementary

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the incentives for consumers to undertake a costly search to acquire information and engage in word of mouth. We find that advertising by the firm crowds out the incentives of individuals to acquire information and engage in word of mouth. Hence, a commitment by the firm not to engage in advertising can increase the diffusion of information. We show that a natural way for a firm to commit to advertise less is to release the information a sufficient amount of time prior to product release. This decreases the present value of the benefit of advertising for the firm, thereby allowing sufficient amount of word of mouth to occur. Our results accord well with observations that word of mouth tends to occur prior to mass advertising being undertaken by a firm. Thus, we characterize consumer search and word of mouth behaviors, and their interactions with firm’s advertising activities. We then present a general result that any source of information (such as increased advertising, media attention or public relations that distribute information in an untargeted way) will reduce the amount of information acquired by consumers and the extent of information diffusion.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. In the next section, we discuss the related literature, and Section 3 presents a model of buzz based on the self-enhancement motive and analyzes how a firm interacts with this motive to maximize the diffusion of information through its information releasing strategy. In Section 4, we examine the effect of advertising on word of mouth generation. We conclude in Section 5.

2 Literature Review

Our paper is most closely related to the literature in social network theory that studies a firm’s optimal strategy in the presence of learning or adoption externality through some forms of local interactions by consumers, including word of mouth. Typically, these papers are interested in how characteristics of the social network interact with a firm’s pricing (Galeotti, 2010; Candogan, Bimpikis and Ozdaglar, 2010; and Ifrach, Maglaras and Scarsini, 2011), or advertising strategy (J. Campbell, 2013; Galeotti and Goyal, 2007; and Chatterjee and Dutta, 2010), or both (A. Campbell, 2013).

In particular, Galeotti 2010 considers costly search for pricing information by consumers in a model where two firms engage in Bertrand competition. Similarly to the current paper, it is costly for consumers to acquire information directly. In contrast to the current paper where we assume that it is costly for the sender to pass on information but not for the receiver to receive it, Galeotti 2010 models word of mouth as costly for the receiver but not for the sender. The difference in assumptions from the current paper is due to the difference in the earlier paper’s focus. The current paper is focused on the motivations of individuals with information to engage in word of mouth (the senders of information). On the other hand, Galeotti 2010 is concerned with the equilibrium of consumer search view of advertising (see Bagwell, 2007 for a comprehensive survey of the literature). In this paper, we only consider the informative view of advertising, and thus, the purpose of advertising is purely to provide information about the existence of product to consumers.
(conducted by the receivers) either directly or through friends and firm pricing.

Many of the other papers in the existing literature have detailed models of the social network, but treat word of mouth generation as a mechanical process, whereby a consumer passes on information upon acquiring it, and the word of mouth stops after a certain number of steps (or with some probability after each step). Galeotti and Goyal 2007 and J. Campbell 2010 assume that firms initially advertise to consumers, and then word of mouth travels a distance of one in the social network.9 Chatterjee and Dutta (2010) assume that the firm can pay individuals to engage in word of mouth. Ifrach et al. (2011), Candogan et al. 2010, and A. Campbell 2013 consider settings where consumers pass on information if they are prepared to purchase the product. This line of analysis has been successful at relating characteristics of the social environment (such as frequency of connections/interactions, distribution of friendships, and clustering of friendships between members of the population) to a firm’s strategy. Given the assumption of word of mouth as a mechanical process in these models, any firm strategy which increases the propensity of any consumer to hold information will facilitate a greater amount of information diffusion. In contrast, our paper addresses the issue of why individuals engage in word of mouth about a firm’s product by explicitly modeling an individual’s social motivation. In addition, there are a number of papers which examine information diffusion through endogenous (privately motivated) communication between individuals in social networks (Galeotti and Mattozzi, 2011; Calvó-Armengol et al., 2012; Stein, 2008; Nichlaus, 2011). However, none of these papers study the effect of exclusivity on the information diffusion. Our social signaling mechanism for word of mouth leads to novel insights into how a firm may *increase* the diffusion of information through *restrictions* on information acquisition and advertising: the firm optimally imposes restrictions in ways which increase the signaling value of the information.

Our paper deals with the incentives for individuals to engage in word of mouth. Prior research in psychology and marketing has proposed several distinct psychological motives that can drive word of mouth communication. For example, some studies have found that word of mouth can be driven by altruism (Henning-Thurau et al., 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, Webster, 1998), reciprocity (Dichter, 1966; Dellarocas et al., 2004) or the desire to signal expertise to others (Wojnicki and Godes, 2011). Although any of these motives can independently drive word of mouth, in this paper, we focus on the latter desire to signal to others in a social setting. The starting point of our model is that consumers derive benefits during social interactions from making themselves “look good.” This assumption is motivated by the psychological theory of “self-enhancement” or the tendency to “affirm the self” (Baumeister, 1998; Fiske, 2001; Sedikides, 1993) and includes the tendency to draw attention to one’s skills and talents (Baumeister, 1998; Wojnicki and Godes, 2011). There is a growing empirical literature in marketing that focuses on the self-presentation motive as a driver of word of mouth (Berger and Milkman, 2012; Berger and Schwartz, 2011; Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2004; Sundaram et al., 1998; Wojnicki and Godes, 2011).

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9Galeotti and Goyal (2007) also extend their untargeted advertising results to a generalized maximum distance.
Finally, our model studies how social interactions between consumers can be influenced by the firm’s strategy. Pesendorfer 1995 analyzes the interaction between a firm’s design innovation and pricing strategy and consumers’ social matching behavior. In his model, owning a fashionable product serves as a matching mechanism: it allows high-type consumers to interact with other high types who also own the product. The focus of Pesendorfer 1995 is on product cycles and pricing, whereas our focus is on how a firm’s information release and advertising strategy interacts with consumers’ social concerns. Yoganarasimhan 2012 also models a fashion firm’s desire to withhold the identity of its “hottest” product in order to enable consumers to signal to each other that they are in “the know” in social interactions. Our paper is similar to Yoganarasimhan 2012 in that both model the firm’s incentive to restrict information in communication strategy to facilitate the social interaction. However, Yoganarasimhan 2012 analyzes the firm’s pricing strategy to extract consumer surplus in a static setting, while we focus on the effect of initial exclusive release on the extent of information diffusion in a dynamic setting.

3 A Model of Buzz Management

3.1 Model Set-up

A monopolist sells a product to a mass 1 of consumers. A consumer $i$ may be one of two types: high or low $\theta = h, l$ where $\Pr[\theta_i = h] = \alpha < \frac{1}{2}$ (high types are relatively scarce). Consumers are privately informed of their own type. In social situations, it is valuable for either type of person to be perceived as the high type by others—a reputational motive that has been referred to as “self-enhancement” in the word of mouth literature. One can think of the high-type consumers as being broadly knowledgeable about the product category (wine enthusiast, technology savvy, knows all the fashionable/trendy restaurants and bars). Importantly, it is valuable to be perceived as a high type, regardless of the consumer’s true type.

We assume that consumers can purchase only if they are informed about the product, and thus the firm’s objective is to maximize the fraction of the population which is informed about the product. We denote the fraction of the population that has received the information $m$ about the product at time $t$ by $S(t)$. Initially, we assume no advertising before introducing it in Section 4. Without advertising, consumers can obtain the information in two ways. First, they may undertake costly search to learn about the product themselves. Second, they may costlessly hear about the product from another person. Once a consumer has found out about the product through either channel, she too is able to pass on the information to others. Our focus in this paper is to study how far the information

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10The concept of self-enhancement is closely related to the concept of reputation-building. We use the term “self-enhancement” to be consistent with the existing word of mouth literature.
eventually diffuses through the population.

When a consumer $i$ decides to undertake costly search to learn about the product, she incurs a search cost for obtaining information $c_i$, which is i.i.d. uniformly on $[0, \bar{c}]$. One can think of this as the minimum amount of time and effort an individual must expend to understand the information. The firm, in addition to this cost, may impose further costs on either or both types through its information release strategy. This is modeled as an additional cost $\nu_h, \nu_l \geq 0$, which is type-specific. Hence, the total cost that an individual $i$ of type $\theta = \{h, l\}$ bears to obtain information $m$ is $c_i + \nu_\theta$.

We assume that imposing a type-specific cost is costless (or involves a very small cost) for the firm. For example, the firm can explicitly increase consumer information acquisition costs through the use of technical jargon (which the high type more easily understands) or, equivalently, can decrease the cost of the high type relative to the low type, through releasing information on blogs, at events, or in venues that are frequented by high types but not low types. What is important for the model is that the firm may differentially affect the costs of each type, and that these costs are common knowledge. Using the Spotify example, the firm created an asymmetry in acquisition costs by posting the invitation to register on its Twitter feed. Hence, all consumers could potentially obtain the invitation, but the cost of acquiring it is lower for the tech-savvy consumers who are already familiar with Twitter. Another prominent example of this occurs when technology companies such as Apple or Samsung make product announcements at events, which are broadcast through live feeds. Again in this instance, tech-savvy individuals have lower costs to find, monitor, and even understand these sources. Thus, being able to engage in word of mouth about the information serves as a signal of an individual’s tech-savvy.

**Timing**

At time $t = -1$, each individual chooses whether to obtain information $m$ about a firm’s product. We assume that this information is hard and verifiable, and a consumer is not able to fabricate information. Note that in our model, the content of information acquired by the consumer does not affect its signaling value. It is the mere fact that the consumer is able to acquire the information that serves as a signal. As we discussed above, an individual $i$ of type $\theta = \{h, l\}$ incurs total costs of $c_i + \nu_\theta$ to obtain information about the product, where $c_i$ is an individual search costs and $\nu_\theta$ is a type-specific cost imposed by the firm.

From time $t = 0$ onwards, individuals meet others at rate $\lambda$ in continuous time. During each meeting, an individual who has acquired the information previously, may pass on the hard information $m$ at a cost $k$, where we assume $\alpha < k < 1 - \alpha$, or pass on no information $\emptyset$ at zero cost. One can think our model fits particularly well many entertainment, technology and fashion product categories where being perceived as knowledgeable about these areas is desirable. In these cases, it would be natural to assume that these costs would be higher for the low type than the high type. However, we do not do this because this assumption is not a necessary condition for the finding that the firm has a strict incentive to treat each type asymmetrically through its information release strategy.
consider this cost as the opportunity cost of the time and effort spent transmitting, articulating and explaining the information to others. Individuals may avoid this extra time and effort by not passing on the information. We assume that communication is done simultaneously during the meeting so that each individual has the ability to do so without seeing the other individual’s information first.

Utility during social interactions

A central element of our model is that individuals derive a benefit from word of mouth due to reputational concerns. In other words, an individual engages in word of mouth in order to make herself look good. We capture this idea through the social utility $U_{ij}$ that an individual $i$ receives from an interaction with another individual $j$, where the utility is an increasing function of the beliefs the other consumer has about the focal consumer’s type. In particular, consumer $i$ receives instantaneous utility $U_i(b_j(\theta_i = h|m,t))$ if consumer $i$ passes a message $m$ at time $t$, where $b_j(\theta_i = h|m,t)$ is $j$’s belief that consumer $i$ is a high type upon receiving the information $m$. And similarly, $i$ receives instantaneous utility $U_i(b_j(\theta_i = h|\emptyset,t))$ if she does not pass on information, where $b_j(\theta_i = h|\emptyset,t)$ is the belief if no signal (denoted by $\emptyset$) is sent. Given our notion of high and low types, we assume $\frac{dU_i}{db_j} > 0$. Also note that the signaling benefit at a time $t$ is the difference between sending a signal and not sending a signal at that time $t$. We assume that utility is linear in beliefs; thus,

$$
\Delta U_i(t) = U_i(b_j(\theta_i = h|m,t)) - U_i(b_j(\theta_i = h|\emptyset,t))
= b_j(\theta_i = h|m,t) - b_j(\theta_i = h|\emptyset,t)
$$

(1)

We also assume that an individual passes on information only when the benefit of doing so is strictly positive: $\Delta U_i(t) > k$.\textsuperscript{13,14}

\textsuperscript{12}More precisely, the belief $b_j$ is also affected by the initial fraction of each type who acquires information at $t = -1$. We introduce this in the next subsection, but we drop this notation here for simplicity.

\textsuperscript{13}In other words, we assume that if an individual is indifferent between passing or not passing on the information, ($\Delta U_i(t) = k$), she chooses not to pass it on. This assumption precludes equilibria where only a fraction of individuals with information chooses to pass it on due to indifference, and these fractions differ across types such that $\Delta U_i(t) = k$ is maintained over time. These types of equilibria are unreasonable since they arbitrarily introduce an asymmetry between the types by manipulating indifference in a very specific manner. Furthermore, the extent of diffusion found in this way is not robust to incorporating individual specific costs of passing on information, which are drawn from $[k,k+\epsilon]$ where $\epsilon$ is arbitrarily small. In our equilibria, all individuals with information act in the same way: they either all pass it on or do not.

\textsuperscript{14}In our model, the consumer bears a positive cost of $k$ of information transmission, and the diffusion of information stops when the difference in beliefs is no longer larger than this cost. Any modeling approach where the difference in beliefs must be greater than a certain threshold for word of mouth to occur will be equivalent to our model. An alternative specification, which is not isomorphic to ours, might utilize a threshold for the posterior belief itself. For example, consider a setting where the focal consumer derives utility from whether the other consumer will take a particular action in the future; for instance, invites them to dinner parties, functions, etc. The other consumer will only do so if his belief is above an exogenous threshold (given by the relative benefit of having the high or low type guest at the dinner party). In this setting, a consumer will only derive a benefit from signaling if she can increase the receiver’s posterior inference above the threshold. Here the beliefs only matter to the extent to which they drive actions. That is, unlike our model, the focal consumer’s utility is not continuous in the other consumer’s belief. In this scenario, an
Finally, we assume that the firm extracts the entire consumer surplus from the sale of the product to the consumer. Thus, from the consumer’s perspective there is no value from obtaining product information for the purposes of making a purchase decision; the only value from information is as a potential signaling device to others. This allows us to focus on the incentives of individuals to acquire information in order to pass it on to others.

3.2 Analysis

We focus on a signaling equilibrium where consumers engage in word of mouth in order to signal to each other that they are a high type. We focus on equilibria where individuals engage in word of mouth while the signaling benefit is strictly greater than the costs of passing on information.

The fraction of each type who acquires information at $t = -1$ determines the total amount of information diffusion. We denote the fraction of each type who becomes informed at $t = -1$ by $\varphi_h, \varphi_l$. These will be endogenously determined in equilibrium, but for now we take $(\varphi_h, \varphi_l)$ (which we denote by $\vec{\varphi}$) as given. For the moment, we also assume that $\varphi_h > \varphi_l$, which will be confirmed in equilibrium subsequently.

The fraction of the population which is informed about the product, $S(t)$, evolves over time as agents mix at rate $\lambda$ and pass on information. The initial condition at $t = -1$ is $S_0 = \varphi_h \alpha + \varphi_l (1 - \alpha)$, and the rate of change of the informed population is given by $\frac{dS}{dt} = \lambda S(t) (1 - S(t))$. This results in the following path for $S(t)$:

$$S(t) = \frac{1}{1 + ae^{-\lambda t}}, \text{ where } a = \frac{1 - S_0}{S_0}$$

which continues to grow until the benefit of passing on the firm’s message is less than or equal to the cost of doing so.

Beliefs change over time as the message diffuses through the population. At $t = 0$, consumers’ beliefs are

$$b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0, \vec{\varphi}) = \frac{\varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha + \varphi_l (1 - \alpha)}$$
$$b_j (\theta_i = h|\emptyset, 0, \vec{\varphi}) = \frac{(1 - \varphi_h) \alpha}{(1 - \varphi_h) \alpha + (1 - \varphi_l) (1 - \alpha)}$$

Note that no word of mouth (no signal) at any time $t$ implies that the sender did not receive the information at $t = -1$. The $h$ and $l$ type are equally likely to hear (or not to hear) about the product through others’ word of mouth for any $t \geq 0$. Hence, the belief on the consumer’s type, conditional individual would only choose to engage in word of mouth when the signaling benefit is large enough (i.e., the posterior belief is above a threshold that triggers a change in the receiver’s behavior). While we feel that this is an equally natural mechanism, it does not add any additional insight to our results. Our simpler assumption of fixed cost of communication captures the idea that diffusion of information halts when the signal associated with word of mouth is weak enough.
on no signal, is constant over time:

$$b_j (\theta_i = h|\varnothing, t, \varnothing) = b_j (\theta_i = h|\varnothing, 0, \varnothing).$$  \hfill (4)$$

On the other hand, a sender who shares word of mouth at time $t$ either obtained the information on her own at $t = -1$ or heard it from a friend. Hence, the belief on the sender’s type upon receiving word of mouth at time $t$ is a mixture of the beliefs at time 0 ($b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0, \varnothing)$ and $b_j (\theta_i = h|\varnothing, 0, \varnothing)$), weighted by the relative fraction of the individuals who acquired information on their own, $\frac{S_0}{S(t)}$, and individuals who heard it from a friend, $1 - \frac{S_0}{S(t)}$:

$$b_j (\theta_i = h|m, t, \varnothing) = \frac{S_0}{S(t)} b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0, \varnothing) + \left[1 - \frac{S_0}{S(t)}\right] b_j (\theta_i = h|\varnothing, 0, \varnothing).$$ \hfill (5)$$

The instantaneous signaling value at $t$ is:

$$\Delta U(t) = U(b_j (\theta_i = h|m, t, \varnothing)) - U(b_j (\theta_i = h|\varnothing, t, \varnothing))$$

$$= \frac{S_0}{S(t)} [b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0, \varnothing) - b_j (\theta_i = h|\varnothing, 0, \varnothing)].$$ \hfill (6)$$

While word of mouth is taking place, $S(t)$ is strictly increasing over time, and thus the instantaneous benefit of signaling is strictly decreasing over time. That is, as information diffuses through the population, and more low types receive information through word of mouth, the signaling value of passing on information decreases. Under our assumption that $\alpha < k < 1 - \alpha$, there exists a time $t^*$ when the instantaneous benefit of word of mouth is exactly equal to the cost of transmission $\Delta U(t^*) = k$, at which point word of mouth stops.\footnote{\textsuperscript{15}We restrict our analysis to strict equilibria. For $t \geq t^*(\varnothing)$, word of mouth does not occur. As long as the out-of-equilibrium belief is such that $b_j (\theta_i = h|m,t) < b_j (\theta_i = h|m,t^*(\varnothing))$ for all $t \geq t^*(\varnothing)$, consumers prefer not to spread word of mouth upon reaching $t^*(\varnothing)$.} The extent of diffusion is

$$S^*(t^*) = \frac{S_0}{k} [b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0) - b_j (\theta_i = h|\varnothing, 0)].$$ \hfill (7)$$

Figure 1 illustrates the effect of consumer beliefs on information diffusion. The top figure shows the evolution of consumer beliefs over time, and the bottom figure shows the growth of informed population $S(t)$. Note that $S(t)$ stops growing when $\Delta U(t^*) = k$, which defines the extent of the diffusion $S^* = S(t^*)$.

We first examine how the extent of information diffusion depends on the fraction of high and low types who acquire information.

\textbf{Proposition 1.} The total information diffusion is increasing (decreasing) in the fraction of high (low) types who acquire information: $\frac{\partial S^*(\varnothing)}{\partial \varphi_h} \geq 0$, $\frac{\partial S^*(\varnothing)}{\partial \varphi_l} \leq 0$, where the former inequality is strict if $\varphi_l < 1$.
Figure 1: The effect of receiver’s beliefs on diffusion of information

*and the latter is strict if \( \varphi_h < 1 \).*

From Equation (7) we can see that the total diffusion is the product of the proportion of the population who acquires the information (\( \frac{S_h}{S(t)} \)) and the instantaneous signaling benefit (\( b_j(\theta_i = h|m,0) - b_j(\theta_i = h|\emptyset,0) \)) at \( t = 0 \). The latter term can also be interpreted as the informativeness of word of mouth as a signal of \( h \) type: the difference in the posterior belief following a message versus no message. Increasing \( \varphi_h \) increases both the initial spread of information and the informativeness of word of mouth as a signal. Hence, the total diffusion of information is increasing in \( \varphi_h \). Similarly, decreasing \( \varphi_l \) increases the informativeness of word of mouth as a signal of \( h \) type. However, decreasing \( \varphi_l \) also decreases the initial spread of information. In our model, the former effect dominates the latter: the extent of the diffusion of the firm’s message is decreasing in \( \varphi_l \). That is, increasing the initial information asymmetry between the two types (increasing the proportion of high types who are informed and decreasing the proportion of low types who are informed) benefits the firm in the long run by maximizing the over-all diffusion of information. An immediate result of the proposition is that the diffusion of information is maximized in the event that all the high types acquire information and none of the low types do, \( \varphi_h = 1 \) and \( \varphi_l = 0 \): maximal asymmetry in information. Of course, Proposition 1 presents the results for exogenously given levels of information acquisition \( \varphi_h \) and \( \varphi_l \). In the next section, we consider the incentives of each consumer type to acquire information at \( t = -1 \), and the optimal way for the firm to influence these incentives through the additional costs it imposes.
Consumers’ Incentives to Acquire Information

We solve for a Perfect Bayesian equilibrium of the model by solving for the consumers’ decision to acquire product information at \( t = -1 \). The decision to acquire the information at \( t = -1 \) depends on the total signaling benefit of word of mouth during the diffusion process. If this benefit is greater than an individual’s cost \( c_i + v_\theta \), then the consumer will acquire information. Denoting the time at which the diffusion process ends by \( t^* \), the total signaling benefit for an agent is then:

\[
V = \lambda \left( \int_0^{t^*} \left( \frac{1 - S(t)}{1 - S_0} \right) (\Delta U(t) - k) \, dt \right) \tag{8}
\]

where the first term \( \frac{1 - S(t)}{1 - S_0} \) is the probability of remaining uninformed at time \( t \) for an individual uninformed at time 0 and the second term, \( \Delta U(t) - k \), is the signaling benefit at each moment in time. We can further simplify the expression to obtain the following:\(^\text{16}\)

\[
V = \left( \frac{k}{1 - S_0} \right) \left( \frac{S^* - S_0}{S_0} + \ln \frac{S_0}{S^*} \right) \tag{9}
\]

Here the total signaling benefit is expressed as a function of only the initial diffusion state (\( S_0 \)) and the total extent of information diffusion (\( S^* \)), both of which are functions of \( \varphi_h \) and \( \varphi_l \). Thus, \( V = V(\bar{\varphi}) \).

The firm can increase the costs of the high and low types for acquiring information differentially by imposing \( v_l \geq 0 \) and \( v_h \geq 0 \). This can create information asymmetry between the two types, which enables an equilibrium where word of mouth can serve as a signaling device. At \( t = -1 \), a customer \( i \) of type \( \theta \) chooses to acquire information if \( c_i + v_\theta \leq V(\bar{\varphi}) \). The proportion of consumers of type \( \theta \) who choose to acquire information is

\[
\varphi_\theta = \Lambda(V(\bar{\varphi}), v_\theta) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } V - v_\theta < 0 \\ \frac{V - v_\theta}{\bar{c}} & \text{if } 0 \leq V - v_\theta \leq \bar{c} \\ 1 & \text{if } V - v_\theta > \bar{c} \end{cases} \tag{10}
\]

Note that the relationship between \( v_\theta \) and \( \varphi_\theta \) is not one-to-one at the extremes of \( \varphi_\theta \) and we assume that if \( \Lambda(V(\bar{\varphi}), \bar{v}_\theta) = \Lambda(V(\bar{\varphi}), \tilde{v}_\theta) \) for \( \bar{v}_\theta \leq \tilde{v}_\theta \), the firm chooses \( \bar{v}_\theta \).

3.3 Optimal Information Release Strategy

The firm’s optimization problem is

\[
\max_{v_h, v_l} S^*(\bar{\varphi}) \tag{11}
\]

\(^{16}\)We do so by making a change of variables for \( dt \), \( \frac{dS}{dt} = \lambda S(t) (1 - S(t)) \Leftrightarrow dt = \frac{dS}{\lambda S(t) (1 - S(t))} \)
subject to

\[
\varphi_h = \Lambda(V(\varphi), v_h) \tag{12}
\]

\[
\varphi_l = \Lambda(V(\varphi), v_l) \tag{13}
\]

\[
v_h \geq 0, \ v_l \geq 0 \tag{14}
\]

We refer to Equation (12) as the high-type consumer’s information acquisition constraint and to Equation (13) as the low-type’s information acquisition constraint. Before finding the optimal strategy for the firm, we note that asymmetry in costs is a necessary condition for word of mouth to take place.

**Lemma 1.** No word of mouth occurs under symmetric costs \((v_h = v_l)\).

The underlying driver for the word of mouth diffusion is the signaling benefit which arises from the initial asymmetry in information between the high and low types \((\varphi_h > \varphi_l)\) in Equation (7). Under symmetric costs (which leads to \(\varphi_h = \varphi_l\) since \(c_i\) for both types is from the same \(i.i.d.\) uniform \([0, \bar{c}]\)), there is no signaling benefit to word of mouth. Since in our model the only purpose of acquiring information is as a signaling device, this implies that \(S^* = 0\). Therefore, no word of mouth arises.

The following proposition characterizes the optimal level of firm-imposed asymmetry in costs across types.

**Proposition 2.** Consider the firm’s optimization problem:

1. If \(\bar{c} \geq \frac{1-k+k\ln k}{1-\alpha}\), the optimal strategy for the firm is to impose a sufficiently large cost on the low type and zero the cost on the high type (large \(v_l\) and \(v_h = 0\)) such that \(\varphi_l = 0\) and \(0 < \varphi_h < 1\).

2. If \(\bar{c} < \frac{1-k+k\ln k}{1-\alpha}\), any cost strategy that implements \(\varphi_h = 1\) is optimal. In particular, while the strategy above (large \(v_l\) and \(v_h = 0\)) is optimal since it implements \(\varphi_l = 0\) and \(\varphi_h = 1\), it is not uniquely optimal.

The proposition shows that the firm benefits from maximal asymmetry in initial information acquisition costs between the two types.\(^{17}\) The optimal strategy for the firm is to restrict information to low-type consumers by setting the cost of information to be sufficiently high while minimizing the costs for the high-type consumers.

Note that it is not only the costs of a given individual but also the costs of others that provide the incentive to engage in word of mouth and to acquire information about the product. For example, suppose that the firm increases the cost to the low type \((v_l)\). The direct effect of this is that each

\(^{17}\)In the first case \((\bar{c} \geq \frac{1-k+k\ln k}{1-\alpha})\), the firm maximizes the firm-imposed portion of the acquisition cost to the low type \((v_l)\) and minimizes the cost to the high type \((v_h)\), but some of the high types’ total acquisition costs \((c_h + v_h)\) are so high that they choose not to acquire information about the product: \(\varphi_h < 1\). The second case \((\bar{c} < \frac{1-k+k\ln k}{1-\alpha})\) is a corner solution, where the over-all diffusion is not affected by \(\varphi_l\) as long as \(\varphi_h = 1\).
low-type consumer now faces a higher cost of information acquisition. However, the indirect effect is that the benefit of acquiring information is increased for the high-type consumer. As we showed in Proposition 1, an increase in information asymmetry between the two types results in an increase of informativeness of word of mouth as a signal, which increases the benefit of acquiring information. Hence, an increase in the cost to the low type results in higher rates of information acquisition by the high-type consumers. In conclusion, an increase in asymmetry in costs (and information) incentivizes consumers to acquire information in a manner that benefits the firm. A firm can manipulate this asymmetry by foregoing opportunities to decrease the costs of the low type or even increasing the costs of this type, through how and what it communicates, and where it makes available information about its product. These types of activities are hard to rationalize in the more mechanical models of word of mouth. This highlights the importance of including the motivation of consumers when analyzing a firm’s optimal strategies in these environments.

Another way to interpret the asymmetry of costs is as being a characteristic of the product category. For some product categories, socially desirable characteristics may be negatively correlated with the costs of acquiring information. Our results suggest that we will observe more word of mouth in product categories where it is desirable to be perceived as knowledgeable. The observation that categories such as wine, technology, fashion, entertainment and dining seem to satisfy this criteria in many social settings and are also amongst those where there is significant word of mouth, is consistent with our result.

4 Seeding Information

In our main model, there are two ways in which consumers can acquire information about the product: (1) individual consumers can engage in costly search for product information; (2) consumers can learn about the product through word of mouth. In practice, the firm can also seed product information to the consumer through marketing communications such as advertising, or through public relations efforts that result in media coverage. We spend most of this section analyzing a simple model of advertising, which is the most common marketing action for the firm, and its effect on consumers' incentives to search and spread of word of mouth. We show that when the marginal cost of advertising is larger, the level of information acquisition is greater, and the overall level of diffusion of information increases. We discuss some available sources of commitment not to advertise. At the end of the section, we establish a result that any source of information that is distributed in a way that is independent of the type of consumers decreases the extent of information diffusion.
4.1 Advertising

In the remainder of this section, we simplify the exposition by assuming that the firm chooses $\nu_h$ and $\nu_l$ optimally such that $\nu_h = 0$ and $\nu_l$ is sufficiently large so that $\varphi_h > 0$ and $\varphi_l = 0$.

Timing

At $t = -1$, consumers choose whether to search for information. At $t = 0$, the firm exposes a fraction $\beta$ of the consumer population to the advertising message about the product,\textsuperscript{18} and from then on consumers engage in word of mouth as before. We restrict our analysis to the firm choosing a pure strategy. Advertising is costly to the firm: $C(\beta) \geq 0$, $C'(\beta) > 1$, $C''(\beta) > 0$ for all $\beta \geq 0$. Our assumption that the marginal cost of advertising at $\beta = 0$ is greater than 1 implies that advertising absent word of mouth is not worthwhile for the firm. We assume consumers only observe whether they themselves receive ($a_i = 1$) or do not receive ($a_i = 0$) the ad; that is, the firm’s total advertising spending ($\beta$) is not observable to the consumers, who instead infer it in equilibrium. The word-of-mouth generation process that occurs at $t > 0$ is the same as in Section 3, except that consumers’ inference and optimal stopping strategy is now also conditional on their beliefs about the level of advertising undertaken by the firm.

Characterizing the Word-of-Mouth Signaling Equilibrium in the Presence of Advertising

We solve for a Perfect Bayesian Nash equilibrium in which, as in the earlier section, the diffusion of the information stops when the marginal value of signaling equals the marginal cost of passing on the information. We focus on the signaling equilibrium, which results in the largest diffusion of information subject to the refinements described in Appendix B. The equilibrium is described by the firm’s and consumers’ strategies $\{\varphi^*_h, \beta^*, \tau^*_i\}$ and their beliefs $\{\tilde{\beta}_i(a_i), b^*_j(\theta_i = h|m,t), b^*_j(\theta_i = h|\emptyset,t)\}$. Here, $\varphi^*_h$ is the fraction of high-type consumers who choose to search for information at $t = -1$, $\beta^*$ is the optimal level of advertising undertaken by the firm at $t = 0$, and $\tau^*_i$ is the equilibrium stopping time of word of mouth. The set of beliefs consists of (1) $\tilde{\beta}_i(a_i)$, the consumers’ belief on the amount of advertising undertaken by the firm, which is conditional on the consumer’s personal exposure to advertising, $a_i$; and (2) $b^*_j$: $j$’s belief on $i$’s type following a social interaction with $i$ at time $t$ during which $i$ either does or does not pass on information.

First, we solve the game beginning with the consumer-to-consumer word of mouth signaling game that occurs after advertising exposure at $t = 0$.

\textsuperscript{18}We model advertising as a one-time pulse for simplification purposes. We discuss in section 4.1 alternative assumptions, such as a continuous advertising technology that gradually informs people over time, and alternative timing, such as the advertising occurring at or prior to $t = -1$. 

14
Consumers’ Word-of-Mouth Decision

When the firm engages in advertising, the inference a consumer makes from an individual passing on information depends on both the level of information acquisition $\varphi_h$ and consumers’ beliefs about the level of advertising undertaken by the firm $\tilde{\beta}$. In particular, $\tilde{\beta}$ affects how the signaling value of information $\Delta U(t)$ evolves over time, and hence how long consumers will continue to spread the information until $\Delta U(t) = k$. We denote the consumers’ inference of the fraction of the population with information about the product due to search and advertising at $t = 0$ by $\tilde{S}_0$, and the consumers’ inferred level of total information diffusion by $\tilde{S}_c^*$. The length of time consumers engage in word of mouth $\tau(\varphi_h, \tilde{\beta})$ is then given by

$$\tau(\varphi_h, \tilde{\beta}) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \frac{\tilde{S}_c^*}{1 - \tilde{S}_0}$$

(15)

The term $\tilde{S}_0$ is increasing in the conjectured level of advertising:

$$\tilde{S}_0(\varphi_h, \tilde{\beta}) = \varphi_h \alpha + \tilde{\beta} ((1 - \varphi_h) \alpha + 1 - \alpha)$$

(16)

The effect of advertising is to increase the initial fraction of the population with information at $t = 0$ from $S_0 = \varphi_h \alpha$ in the basic model with no advertising (where $\varphi_l = 0$) to $\tilde{S}_0 = \varphi_h \alpha + \beta ((1 - \varphi_h) \alpha + 1 - \alpha)$ in the model with advertising. Note that the consumer-to-consumer signaling game through word of mouth remains the same as in the basic model, with the only difference in the initial level of exposure prior to word of mouth diffusion. Suppose that consumers’ beliefs about the level of advertising the firm undertakes $\tilde{\beta}$ is not so large that no word of mouth takes place ($\tilde{\beta} < \tilde{\beta} \equiv \frac{\varphi_h \alpha}{k(1 - \varphi_h \alpha)} \left(1 - k - \frac{(1 - \varphi_h) \alpha}{1 - \varphi_h \alpha}\right)$). The following Lemma summarizes the characteristics of the consumers’ conjectured level of total diffusion $\tilde{S}_c^*(\varphi_h, \tilde{\beta})$.

**Lemma 2.** For a given amount of initial information acquisition ($\varphi_h$),

1. The consumers’ conjectured level of information diffusion $\tilde{S}_c^*$ is independent of the consumers’ beliefs about the level of advertising $\tilde{\beta}$: $\tilde{S}_c^*(\varphi_h, \tilde{\beta}) = \tilde{S}_c^*(\varphi_h, 0)$ for all $0 \leq \tilde{\beta} \leq \tilde{\beta}$.

2. The duration of word of mouth is decreasing in the conjectured level of advertising: $\frac{d\tau}{d\tilde{\beta}} < 0$.

For a given level of initial information acquisition by consumers $\varphi_h$, the consumers’ conjectured level of total diffusion is independent of the consumers’ beliefs about the level of advertising $\tilde{\beta}$, provided that $\tilde{\beta}$ is not so large that $\tilde{\beta} < \tilde{\beta}$. The incentives to engage in word of mouth at any point in time is governed by the signaling value of the information. The signaling value is determined by the initial asymmetry in information acquisition between high and low type consumers, and the number of consumers of each type who have acquired the information subsequently through word of mouth or
advertising. More importantly, for a given level of initial information acquisition through consumer search, the change in the signaling value of information is the same whether an additional individual is informed via either word-of-mouth or advertising. The mechanics of diffusion are the same since in both information channels individuals are informed randomly; individuals receive information irrespective of their type. Since both advertising and word of mouth reduce asymmetry between high and low types in the same way, advertising has the same diluting effect on the signaling value of information as word of mouth. Hence, advertising is a pure substitute for word of mouth, which stops at the point where \( \Delta U(t) = k \). That is, conditional on a given \( \varphi_h \), consumer's beliefs do not affect the conjectured extent of information diffusion, \( \tilde{S}_c^* \).

Although the conjectured level of advertising does not affect the extent of information diffusion, it does affect the duration of word of mouth. The effect comes through the initial level of information \( \tilde{S}_0(\varphi_h, \bar{\beta}) \), which is increasing in \( \bar{\beta} \). Thus, the time \( \tau(\varphi_h, \bar{\beta}) \) for information to spread from this level to the cutoff is decreasing in \( \tilde{S}_0 \) and the conjectured level of advertising \( \bar{\beta} \). That is, as more consumers are initially informed about the product through advertising, the duration of word of mouth decreases.

Figure 2 illustrates the difference in information diffusion with and without advertising conditional on a given level of information acquisition. It shows that advertising reduces the asymmetry in information spread between high and low types at \( t = 0 \) by randomly distributing information to more consumers. Since the asymmetry is reduced in exactly the same way as would otherwise have taken place through word of mouth, beliefs are lower at each moment in time but the same conditional
on the fraction of the population that have the information. Hence, conditional on a given level of information acquisition, advertising does not change the extent of total information diffusion ($S^*$), but the diffusion occurs for a shorter length of time ($t^{**} < t^*$).

**Firm’s Advertising Decision**

The firm chooses an optimal level of advertising which maximizes the firm’s conjectured level of diffusion $\tilde{S}^*_f$. This conjectured level of diffusion depends on the firm’s conjecture on the length of time consumers engage in word of mouth $\tilde{\tau}$, the fraction of high types who acquire information $\varphi_h$, and its own level of advertising:

$$
\beta (\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau}) = \arg \max_{\beta \in [0,1]} \tilde{S}^*_f (\varphi_h, \beta, \tilde{\tau}) - C (\beta),
$$

(17)

The function $\tilde{S}^*_f (\varphi_h, \beta, \tilde{\tau})$ can be written in terms of the actual level of initial information acquisition $S_0 (\varphi_h, \beta)$ and the conjectured amount of time consumers will spread information $\tilde{\tau}$:

$$
\tilde{S}^*_f (\varphi_h, \beta, \tilde{\tau}) = \frac{1}{1 + ae^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}}, \quad \text{where } a = \frac{1 - S_0 (\varphi_h, \beta)}{S_0 (\varphi_h, \beta)}.
$$

(18)

For a given $\varphi_h$, a firm is able to influence $\tilde{S}^*_f$ through advertising activity, which changes the informed share of the population $S_0 (\varphi_h, \beta)$ at $t = 0$. It is important to note that the actual amount of advertising $\beta$ does not affect the length of time that word of mouth occurs, because it is not directly observable to consumers. Only consumers’ own expectations of the level of advertising $\tilde{\beta}$ in equilibrium affect the length of time. Thus, advertising increases the number of individuals engaging in word of mouth for a fixed amount of time $\tilde{\tau}$.

Given $\varphi_h$ (the actual level of information acquisition) and $\tilde{\tau}$ (the firm’s conjectured length of time that consumers will engage in word of mouth), the firm chooses an optimal level of advertising that balances the marginal costs of advertising $C' (\beta)$ against the marginal impact on the firm’s conjectured level of diffusion $\frac{d\tilde{S}^*_f}{d\beta}$ from equation (17).\(^{19}\) Moreover, in the case where advertising is positive ($\beta^* > 0$), the best response function is increasing in the conjectured amount of time consumers engage in word of mouth $\frac{\partial C'}{\partial \tilde{\tau}} > 0$, and satisfies the first order condition $C' (\beta) = \frac{d\tilde{S}^*_f}{d\beta} = \frac{d\tilde{S}^*_f}{\beta S_0} \frac{dS_0}{d\beta}$. Here, the second equality relationship follows from the observation that advertising only affects the level of diffusion through the level of information $S_0$ at $t = 0$.

**Consumers’ Information Acquisition**

As before, consumers choose to acquire information if the signaling value of doing so exceeds the cost. In this section, we assume that only high types have low enough costs to acquire information. The

\(^{19}\)The exact condition for the firm’s optimal advertising strategy is derived in Lemma 4 in Appendix A.
cutoff type $\varphi_h^*$ and value of acquiring information $V^*$ satisfy:

$$
\varphi_h^* = \begin{cases} 
0 & \text{if } V^* < 0 \\
\frac{V^*}{\bar{c}} & \text{if } 0 \leq V^* \leq \bar{c} \\
1 & \text{if } V^* > \bar{c}
\end{cases}
$$

(19)

**Perfect Bayesian Equilibrium**

We find that the consumers’ anticipation of advertising by the firm affects the total value of signaling and the incentives for individuals to acquire the information. The following proposition gives the main result of the section: the extent of diffusion is greater when the firm has larger marginal costs of advertising.

**Proposition 3.** Consider two cost functions of advertising $C_1$ and $C_2$ where $C'_1 < C'_2$.

1. When the marginal cost of advertising is larger, the level of advertising is lower and the length of diffusion is longer: $\beta_1(\varphi_h) \geq \beta_2(\varphi_h)$ and $t_1(\varphi_h) \leq t_2(\varphi_h)$, for any given $\varphi_h \leq 1$.

2. Moreover, the level of initial information acquisition and the extent of information diffusion are also greater when the marginal costs of advertising are larger: $\varphi_{h1}^* \leq \varphi_{h2}^*$ and $S^*(\varphi_{h1}^*) \leq S^*(\varphi_{h2}^*)$.

The proposition shows that a higher marginal cost of advertising leads to an unambiguously greater diffusion of information for the firm. When the cost of advertising is greater, consumers anticipate that the level of advertising will be lower, and thus the length of the diffusion will be longer for a given amount of information acquired $\varphi_h$. Although advertising does not affect the level of diffusion for a given level of $\varphi_h$, it reduces the duration that consumers continue to spread the information. Advertising removes signaling opportunities for individuals by serving as a substitute for word of mouth and thus reduces the overall benefit to an agent from acquiring information ex-ante. Hence, higher advertising costs result in an equilibrium with a lower level of advertising, more initial information acquisition and greater overall diffusion.

As we see from Proposition 3, a firm may benefit from higher advertising costs since these costs serve as a credible commitment to advertise less in equilibrium. For example, smaller and less established firms with smaller advertising budgets (and higher costs of capital) have higher marginal costs of advertising. Our results suggest that word of mouth will more readily occur for products of these firms than for products of more established firms.
Advertising Timing

As we saw in the preceding analysis and discussion, advertising interferes with word of mouth. Here we discuss the extent to which this result is affected by the timing of advertising exposure. We find that the results are qualitatively similar under a variety of assumptions. For instance, one might consider making the advertising decision occur before consumers acquire information at $t = -2$, simultaneously at the moment of information acquisition at $t = -1$, or modeling advertising as a continual process over time during the word of mouth diffusion, $t \geq 0$. In this section, we argue that in all of these cases, the qualitative nature of advertising effect is the same, namely, that advertising substitutes for word of mouth, thereby removing signaling opportunities and reducing the benefit of acquiring information.

In fact, we argue that this type of timing, where consumers are exposed early on in the word of mouth diffusion process, may occur as the equilibrium of the game where the firm chooses the timing as well as the amount of advertising. Finally, we suggest that in the presence of time discounting, the firm may be able to precommit to delaying advertising by leaking product information far ahead of the product release date.

Of the three potential alternative specifications mentioned above, the only one that fundamentally affects the structure of the game is the case when we assume that advertising takes place prior to information acquisition at $t = -2$, because here consumer may condition the information acquisition decision on whether or not she received information via advertising. This in turn implies that the fraction of the population with information at $t = 0$ (i.e., $S_0$) would change, which in turn affects the value of acquiring information $V = k \frac{S^*}{1 - S_0} - \ln \frac{S^*}{S_0}$. The cutoff type which acquires information satisfies:

$$\varphi_h \bar{c} = k \frac{S^*}{1 - S_0} - \ln \frac{S^*}{S_0}$$

where $\tilde{S}_0$ and $\tilde{S}^*$ are the same expressions as earlier. The term $V = k \frac{S^*}{1 - S_0} - \ln \frac{S^*}{S_0}$ is decreasing in the conjectured level of advertising ($\frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} = \frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} \frac{\partial S_0}{\partial \beta} + \frac{\partial V}{\partial S^*} \frac{\partial S^*}{\partial \beta} < 0$ since $\frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} < 0$, from Lemma 3 in the proof of Proposition 2, $\frac{\partial S_0}{\partial \beta} > 0, \frac{\partial S^*}{\partial \beta} = 0$). Hence, the qualitative effect of increasing the costs of advertising is the same: larger costs lead consumers to conjecture that the firm has undertaken less advertising, and this increases the value of acquiring the information and leads more high types to acquire it. In the cases where advertising occurs at the same time as information acquisition at $t = -1$ or at the same time as word of mouth diffusion, the effect is the same as earlier. The extent of information acquisition and diffusion in equilibrium are determined by consumers’ belief about the amount of advertising that the firm undertakes. In both cases, this belief is smaller when the costs of advertising are higher.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20}If we assume that advertising occurs simultaneously with information acquisition at $t = -1$, the analysis is unchanged. Also, there are a number of ways one might model a firm advertising gradually over time. However, provided that the model generates the prediction that lower costs of advertising lead to greater advertising at each moment of
Interestingly, even though the firm may prefer to commit not to advertise early on, it may have trouble doing so credibly. Consider the incentives of a firm choosing the timing for a one-time advertising campaign. As we saw in equation (18), the benefit of advertising to a firm is that it increases the mass of consumers who are passing on information until a fixed time. The length of time is not directly affected by the actual level of advertising, because it is unobservable. Instead, the length of time is determined by consumers’ equilibrium conjecture. If a firm also chooses the timing of advertising, it will choose to advertise as early as possible to allow the additional mass of individuals informed by advertising to diffuse information for as long as possible.\textsuperscript{21} Hence, in an equilibrium, consumers will infer that a firm will advertise at $t = 0$, and the analysis will be otherwise unchanged.

One way in which a firm may be able to commit to delay advertising is by separating in time the release of information about the product (and the ensuing word of mouth) and the actual product release. For instance, suppose that the firm releases product information far ahead of the announced product release date. If we define $T$ as the amount of time between the information release and the product release, the monopolist can choose a large enough $T$ to credibly commit not to advertise and maximize the diffusion of information due to word of mouth. Of course, the separation in time is an issue only in the presence of time discounting.

**Proposition 4.** In the presence of time discounting, there exists a $\tilde{T}$ such that for $T > \tilde{T}$ the firm undertakes no advertising, and the maximum possible diffusion occurs.

Due to time discounting (and since the firm does not earn profits until a future date), an early release of information lowers the benefit the firm derives from current period advertising. The result is consistent with the observation that delaying advertising may promote word-of-mouth generation. For example, in an influential 2000 Harvard Business Review article, Dye recommends\textsuperscript{20} that “while the media and advertising can help fan the flames of buzz, involving them too early can help undermine buzz. Indeed, the vanguard will often reject a heavily promoted product merely because of overexposure.” Also consistent with this logic, Spotify started its mass advertising in March 2013, only after word of mouth had sufficiently spread.

### 4.2 Untargeted Exposure to Product Information

We have shown that advertising displaces consumers’ incentives to engage in word of mouth and results in smaller overall diffusion. However, consumers may acquire information through a wide variety of channels, which to a greater or lesser extent may be influenced by a firm. In this section, we show that consumer search and information diffusion are decreasing in the amount of untargeted information time during the diffusion of information, that will reduce the value of acquiring information. Hence, we do not expect that the basic results will change in this setting.

\textsuperscript{21}In developing the model along these lines, one would also need to use a similar type of trembling refinement for consumer beliefs following the off-equilibrium timing choices by the firm.
that the population receives. The key driver behind our earlier result is not the advertising context per se, but the fact that the delivery of information is untargeted.

To generalize our finding to contexts other than advertising, we consider any untargeted exposure to product information. That is, suppose that prior to acquiring information on their own and engaging in word of mouth, a fraction \( \beta \) of consumers in the population are exposed to the product information in an untargeted manner. Here, the level of \( \beta \) is exogenously given and we assume it is common knowledge. One can think of this common knowledge as deriving from knowledge of the costs of advertising as in the previous section, or from knowledge of other processes of information dissemination such as media attention or public relations. The next proposition characterizes consumer search \( \varphi_h^{\ast} (\beta) \) and information diffusion \( S^{\ast} (\varphi_h^{\ast} (\beta), \beta) \) as a function of \( \beta \).

**Proposition 5.** Suppose \( \varphi_h^{\ast} (0) < 1 \) and \( 0 \leq \beta' < \beta'' \leq S^{\ast} (\varphi_h^{\ast} (\beta''), 0) \). An increase in the level of untargeted exposure of consumers to product information results in a lower level of information acquisition by the consumer, and a lower level of overall information diffusion: \( \varphi_h (\beta') > \varphi_h (\beta'') \) and \( S^{\ast} (\varphi_h^{\ast} (\beta'), \beta') > S^{\ast} (\varphi_h^{\ast} (\beta''), \beta''). \)

In the proposition above, we show that the untargeted exposure of consumers to product information ultimately crowds out information diffusion via word of mouth more than one-for-one. That is, an increase in \( \beta \) results in a decrease of both the amount of information acquired \( \varphi_h \), and a decrease in the extent of information diffusion \( S^{\ast} \). Similar to the advertising case, the intuition for the result comes from two observations. First, diffusion of information via word of mouth informs individuals in an untargeted manner because individuals randomly mix. Thus, for a given amount of information acquisition \( \varphi_h \), the change in the signaling value of information is the same whether an additional individual is informed via either word of mouth or exogneoues information \( \beta \). The extent of diffusion \( S^{\ast} (\varphi_h, \beta) \), where the signaling value is equal to the cost of passing on information \( \Delta U (t) = k \), is therefore independent of \( \beta \) for a given level of information acquisition \( \varphi_h \). Second, although the extent of diffusion is unchanged, exogenous information removes opportunities for individuals who have acquired information to signal their type. Hence, their anticipated signaling value \( V (\varphi_h, \beta) \) of acquiring information ex-ante is lower for greater levels of exogenous information. The extent of diffusion will go down because fewer high types will acquire information, making word of mouth a weaker signal.

For the firm, the greatest level of diffusion via word of mouth can be achieved when there is no exogenous information, i.e., \( \beta = 0 \). This general result implies that firm’s traditional marketing actions (such as advertising or public relations) crowd out the incentives for individuals to acquire information and engage in word of mouth when the exposure is not correlated with individual type.
5 Conclusion

In this paper, we study how a firm’s communication strategy (which consists of information release and marketing actions such as advertising) is shaped by the incentives of individuals to acquire information and engage in word of mouth. We develop a model in which a firm’s objective is to maximize the diffusion of information about its product, and consumers are motivated to engage in word of mouth by self-enhancement. A firm maximizes the diffusion of information by structuring its information release strategy such that the act of acquiring and passing on information through word of mouth serves as a signal of a consumer’s type. In our model, the firm chooses to optimally restrict access to information to low social type consumers in order to stimulate word of mouth. Even though these activities seem to restrict the spread of information in the immediate term, they in fact serve to maximize the total diffusion of information. The firm also benefits from a commitment not to undertake advertising, which serves to crowd out word of mouth as a source of information. We highlight that a potential source of this commitment is to coordinate the information release a sufficient amount of time prior to the product release.

A key lesson from our study is that word of mouth is a subtle process for the firm to influence. In our model, consumers only engage in word of mouth if it can serve as a signal; therefore, if low social types have been given or have similar access to the information as high types, little word of mouth will ensue. The existence of asymmetries in information between the two types enables word of mouth to occur. This emphasizes the challenge a firm faces in harnessing the power of word of mouth. Beyond simply getting information into the hands of particular individuals, who may engage in word of mouth, it must do so in such a way that the information may serve as a signal. Thus, a firm’s strategy to stimulate word of mouth through information release and advertising is as much about who does not have information as it is about who does.
A Proofs

A.1 Proof of Proposition 1

First, we replace \( b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0) \) and \( b_j (\theta_i = h|\emptyset, 0) \) and express the total extent of diffusion in terms of \( \varphi_h, \varphi_l (\varphi_h > \varphi_l) \):

\[
S^* (\varphi_h, \varphi_l) = \frac{\alpha}{k} \left[ \varphi_h - (1 - \varphi_h) \frac{\varphi_h \alpha + \varphi_l (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h \alpha - \varphi_l (1 - \alpha)} \right]
\]  

(21)

The derivatives of \( S^* \) with respect to \( \varphi_h, \varphi_l \) are

\[
\frac{\partial S^*}{\partial \varphi_h} = \frac{1}{k} \left[ \frac{(1 - \varphi_l) (1 - \alpha)}{((1 - \varphi_h) \alpha + (1 - \varphi_l) (1 - \alpha))^2} \right] \geq 0, \text{ if } \varphi_l < 1 \text{ then } > 0
\]  

(22)

\[
\frac{\partial S^*}{\partial \varphi_l} = -\frac{\alpha}{k} \left[ \frac{(1 - \varphi_h) (1 - \alpha)}{((1 - \varphi_h) \alpha + (1 - \varphi_l) (1 - \alpha))^2} \right] \leq 0, \text{ if } \varphi_h < 1 \text{ then } < 0
\]  

A.2 Proof of Lemma 1

Under symmetric costs, \( v_h = v_l \), it is immediate that \( \varphi_h = \varphi_l \) because \( c_i \) for both types is from the same i.i.d. uniform \([0, \bar{c}]\). Then, \( b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0, \bar{c}) = \frac{\varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha + \varphi_l (1 - \alpha)} = \alpha, b_j (\theta_i = h|\emptyset, 0, \bar{c}) = \frac{(1 - \varphi_h) \alpha}{(1 - \varphi_h) \alpha + (1 - \varphi_l) (1 - \alpha)} = \alpha. \) Hence, we have \( b_j (\theta_i = h|m, 0, \bar{c}) - b_j (\theta_i = h|\emptyset, 0, \bar{c}) = 0 \), which implies that \( S^* = 0. \) Therefore, no word of mouth arises.

A.3 Proof of Proposition 2

The firm’s optimization problem is equivalent to maximizing the spread of information through the choice of \( \varphi_l \) and \( \varphi_h \):

\[
\max_{\varphi_h, \varphi_l} S^* (\varphi_h, \varphi_l)
\]

subject to the feasibility constraints:

\[
\varphi_h \bar{c} \leq V (\varphi_h, \varphi_l) \\
\varphi_l \bar{c} \leq V (\varphi_h, \varphi_l) \\
0 \leq \varphi_h \leq 1 \\
0 \leq \varphi_l \leq 1
\]

First consider case (ii). Note that \( V (1, 0) = \frac{1 - k \ln k}{1 - \alpha} \). Hence if \( \bar{c} \geq \frac{1 - k \ln k}{1 - \alpha} \) then \( S^* (1, 0) \) is feasible. From Proposition 1 we know that this is the maximum value of \( S^* \) for \( 0 \leq \varphi_h, \varphi_l \leq 1. \) Furthermore, \( \frac{\partial S^*}{\partial \varphi_l} = 0 \) when \( \varphi_h = 1 \) so any feasible pair \((1, \varphi_l)\) will also result in the same level of diffusion.
Now consider case (i) where \( c < 1 - k + k \ln k / (1 - \alpha) \). In this case, \( S^\ast (1, 0) \) is not feasible. Proposition 1 showed that \( S^\ast \) is increasing in \( \varphi_h \) when \( \varphi_l < 1 \) and decreasing in \( \varphi_l \) if \( \varphi_h < 1 \). It is immediate that, in the optimum, the firm will choose the maximum feasible \( \varphi_h \varphi_l^c = V(\varphi_h, \varphi_l) \) or \( \varphi_h^* = 1 \).

To conclude that the firm will minimize \( \varphi_l \), we need that increasing \( \varphi_l \) does not relax the feasibility constraint \( \partial V / \partial \varphi_l \leq 0 \). We proceed with the following lemma.

**Lemma 3.** The total signaling benefit is increasing in \( S^\ast \) and decreasing in \( S_0 \): \( \partial V / \partial S^\ast > 0 \) and \( \partial V / \partial S_0 < 0 \).

**Proof.** The derivatives of \( V \) with respect to \( S^\ast \) and \( S_0 \) are

\[
\frac{\partial V}{\partial S^\ast} = \left( k \left( 1 - S_0 \right) \right) \left[ \frac{1}{S_0} - \frac{1}{S^\ast} \right],
\]

\[
\frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} = \left[ k \left( 1 - S_0 \right) \right] \left( \frac{S^\ast}{S_0} - 1 + \ln S_0 - \ln S^\ast \right) + \left( \frac{k}{1 - S_0} \right) \left( \frac{S^\ast}{S_0} + \frac{1}{S_0} \right)
\]

\[= \left[ \frac{k}{(1 - S_0)^2 S_0^2} \right] \left\{ (S^\ast - S_0) (2S_0 - 1) + S_0^2 \left( \ln \frac{S_0}{S^\ast} \right) \right\}. \]

We have that \( \left( k \left( 1 - S_0 \right) \right) \left[ \frac{1}{S_0} - \frac{1}{S^\ast} \right] > 0 \). Hence, \( \partial V / \partial S^\ast > 0 \).

Next, we show that \( \partial V / \partial S_0 < 0 \). Note that it is immediate that \( \partial V / \partial S_0 < 0 \) when \( 2S_0 - 1 < 0 \), which is true for \( S_0 < \frac{1}{2} \). If \( S_0 \geq \frac{1}{2} \), we need that

\[
(S^\ast - S_0) (2S_0 - 1) + S_0^2 \left( \ln \frac{S_0}{S^\ast} \right) < 0 \iff S_0^2 \left( \ln \frac{S_0}{S^\ast} \right) < (S^\ast - S_0) (1 - 2S_0)
\]

\[\iff \frac{\ln \frac{S_0}{S^\ast}}{\frac{S^\ast}{S_0} - 1} < \left( \frac{1}{S_0} - 2 \right). \]

Now consider the left-hand side, where \( x = \frac{S^\ast}{S_0} > 1 \):

\[
\frac{\ln \frac{1}{x}}{x - 1} = -\ln x \iff -\ln x = \frac{\ln x - x - 1}{x - 1} \iff \frac{\ln x - x - 1}{x - 1}
\]

which is greater than 0 for \( x > 1 \). To see this, note that \( \frac{\ln x}{x - 1} - \frac{1}{x} > 0 \iff \ln x > 1 - \frac{1}{x} \), which is a known relation for the natural log.

Hence, the left-hand side of the above is increasing in \( \frac{S^\ast}{S_0} \), and an upper bound on the left-hand side is given by \( -\frac{\ln \frac{1}{S_0}}{\frac{S^\ast}{S_0} - 1} \), and we need only check that

\[
-\frac{\ln \frac{1}{S_0}}{\frac{S^\ast}{S_0} - 1} < \frac{1}{S_0} - 2 \iff -\ln y - (y - 2) (y - 1) < 0, \text{ where } y = \frac{1}{S_0}.
\]
Finally we verify that there exists a $c$ and constraint for $V$ and note that

$\partial V = \frac{\partial S}{\partial \varphi} \partial S / \partial \varphi_i$. Hence, $\partial V / \partial \varphi_i < 0$ for $1 \leq y \leq 2$.

and note that $\lim_{y \to 1} [-\ln y - (y - 2)(y - 1)] = 0$. Hence, $-\ln y - (y - 2)(y - 1) < 0$, which shows that $\frac{\partial V}{\partial S} < 0$.

Next, consider $V$ as a function of $S_0$ and $S^*$, $V(S^*, S_0) = \left( k \frac{S^* - S_0}{1 - S_0} + \ln \frac{S_0}{S^*} \right)$. Taking the derivative $\frac{dV}{d\varphi_i}$:

$$\frac{dV}{d\varphi_i} = \frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} \frac{dS_0}{d\varphi_i} + \frac{\partial V}{\partial S^*} \frac{dS^*}{d\varphi_i}.$$ 

From Lemma 3, $\frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} < 0$, $\frac{\partial V}{\partial S^*} > 0$, and note that $\frac{\partial S_0}{\partial \varphi_i} > 0$, and when $\varphi_h < 1$ $\frac{dS^*}{d\varphi_i} \leq 0$ (from Proposition 1). Hence,

$$\frac{dV}{d\varphi_i} = \frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} \frac{dS_0}{d\varphi_i} + \frac{\partial V}{\partial S^*} \frac{dS^*}{d\varphi_i} < 0.$$

We conclude that $\varphi_i = 0$ when $\varphi_h < 1$ because $\varphi_i$ reduces the objective and tightens the feasibility constraint for $\varphi_h$.

Finally, we verify that there exists a $\varphi_h^* > 0$ such that $V(\varphi_h^*, 0)$. When $\varphi_i = 0$:

$$S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0) = \varphi_h^* \alpha$$

$$S^*(\varphi_h^*, 0) = \alpha \left[ \frac{\varphi_h^* (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha} \right]$$

$$V(\varphi_h^*, 0) = \left( \frac{k}{1 - S_0} \right) \left( \frac{S^* - S_0}{S_0} + \ln \frac{S_0}{S^*} \right) = \left( \frac{k}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{1}{\frac{\varphi_h^* (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha}} - \frac{\varphi_h^*}{\varphi_h^* \alpha} + \ln \frac{\varphi_h^*}{\frac{\varphi_h^* (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha}} \right)$$

$$= \left( 1 - \alpha \right) \left( \frac{1}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{k}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{1}{1 - \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{k}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{1}{\frac{\varphi_h^* (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha}} - \frac{\varphi_h^*}{\varphi_h^* \alpha} + \ln \frac{\varphi_h^*}{\frac{\varphi_h^* (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha}} \right)$$

$$= \left( 1 - \alpha \right) \left( \frac{1}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{k}{1 - \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{1}{1 - \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{k}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha} \right) \left( \frac{1}{\frac{\varphi_h^* (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha}} - \frac{\varphi_h^*}{\varphi_h^* \alpha} + \ln \frac{\varphi_h^*}{\frac{\varphi_h^* (1 - \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha}} \right)$$

We note $\lim_{\varphi_h \to 0} V(\varphi_h, 0) = k \left( \frac{1 - \alpha}{k} - 1 - \ln \frac{1 - \alpha}{k} \right) > 0$, and hence there exists $0 < \varphi_h^* < 1$ such that $\nabla^* = V(\varphi_h^*, 0)$. Therefore, the optimal strategy for the firm has the following characteristics: $\varphi_h < 1$ and $\varphi_i = 0$ if $\tau > \frac{1 - \alpha}{1 - \alpha} > 1$ if $\tau < \frac{1 - \alpha}{1 - \alpha}$. 

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A.4 Proof of Lemma 2

First, let $\tilde{\beta} = \frac{\varphi_{h}\alpha}{k(1-\varphi_{h}\alpha)} \left(1-k-\frac{(1-\varphi_{h})\alpha}{1-\varphi_{h}\alpha}\right)$. The relationship for the extent of diffusion is determined by

$$S_{c}^{*}(\varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}) = \frac{S_{0}}{k} \left[b_{j}\left(\theta_{i} = h|m, 0, \varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}\right) - b_{j}\left(\theta_{i} = h|0, 0, \varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}\right)\right],$$

where $b_{j}\left(\theta_{i} = h|m, 0, \varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}\right) = \frac{\varphi_{h}\alpha + \tilde{\beta}(1-\varphi_{h})\alpha}{\varphi_{h}\alpha + \tilde{\beta}(1-\varphi_{h})\alpha}$ and $b_{j}\left(\theta_{i} = h|0, 0, \varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}\right) = \frac{\alpha(1-\varphi_{h})}{1-\varphi_{h}\alpha}$. When $0 \leq \tilde{\beta} \leq \beta$, then $b_{j}\left(\theta_{i} = h|m, 0, \varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}\right) - b_{j}\left(\theta_{i} = h|0, 0, \varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}\right) \geq k$, and there are incentives to engage in word of mouth at $t = 0$. We find that

$$S_{c}^{*}(\varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}) = \frac{\varphi_{h}\alpha + \tilde{\beta}(1-\varphi_{h})\alpha}{k} \left[\frac{\varphi_{h}\alpha + \tilde{\beta}(1-\varphi_{h})\alpha}{\varphi_{h}\alpha + \tilde{\beta}(1-\varphi_{h})\alpha} - \frac{\alpha(1-\varphi_{h})}{1-\varphi_{h}\alpha}\right].$$

Second, when $0 \leq \tilde{\beta} \leq \beta$ the best response time $\tau(\varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta})$ is given by

$$\tau(\varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left[\frac{\tilde{S}_{c}^{*}(\varphi_{h}^{*}, \tilde{\beta})}{1 - \tilde{S}_{c}^{*}(\varphi_{h}^{*}, \tilde{\beta})}\right] = \frac{1}{S_{0}} \left[\frac{1}{1 - \tilde{S}_{c}(\varphi_{h}^{*}, \tilde{\beta})}\right].$$

where $\tilde{S}_{0}(\varphi_{h}, \tilde{\beta}) = \varphi_{h}\alpha + \tilde{\beta}((1-\varphi_{h})\alpha + 1 - \alpha)$. And we know from above that $\frac{d\tilde{S}_{c}^{*}}{d\beta} = 0$. It is now straightforward to find the derivative is

$$\frac{d\tau^{*}}{d\beta} = -\frac{1-\varphi_{h}\alpha}{\lambda} \left[\frac{1}{1 - \tilde{S}_{0}} + \frac{1}{\tilde{S}_{0}}\right] < 0.$$

A.5 Proof of Proposition 3

It is useful to define the equilibrium level of information acquisition without advertising $\varphi_{h}^{**}$ (from equation 23). It satisfies the following condition:

$$\varphi_{h}^{**} = \frac{1-\alpha}{(1-\varphi_{h}^{**}\alpha)^{2}} - \left(\frac{k}{1-\varphi_{h}^{**}\alpha}\right) \left(1 - \ln \frac{k(1-\varphi_{h}^{**}\alpha)}{1-\alpha}\right).$$

We begin with the following Lemma:

**Lemma 4.** When the marginal cost of advertising $C'(0)$ is not too large, there exists a cutoff $\hat{\tau}$

If $C'(0)$ is too large, the firm never advertises such that $\beta = 0$ for all $\hat{\tau} \geq 0$. 

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such that for all $0 \leq \tilde{\tau} \leq \bar{\tau}$, the optimal level of advertising is $\beta^* = 0$, and for all $\tilde{\tau} > \bar{\tau}$, the firm’s optimal choice of advertising is $\beta^* > 0$.

**Proof.** The firm’s choice of advertising is determined by:

$$\beta (\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau}) = \arg \max_{\beta \in [0,1]} \tilde{S}^* (\varphi_h, \beta, \tilde{\tau}) - C (\beta)$$

A firm is able to influence $\tilde{S}^*$ through the initial informed share of the population $S_0 (\varphi_h, \beta)$ but cannot directly influence $\bar{\tau}$, which is only affected by consumers’ expectations of the level of advertising $\hat{\beta}$ in equilibrium. Hence, the marginal effect of advertising on $\tilde{S}^*$ is

$$\frac{d \tilde{S}^*}{d \beta} = \frac{d \tilde{S}^*}{d S_0} \frac{d S_0}{d \beta} = \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[S_0 + (1 - S_0) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}.$$ 

Also, note that $\frac{d^2 \tilde{S}^*}{d \beta^2} = \frac{2 e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}) (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)^2}{[S_0 + (1 - S_0) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^3} < 0$, and by assumption $C'' (\beta) > 0$, so that the objective is strictly concave, and a first-order condition can be used for interior solutions for $\beta \in (0,1)$. Thus, if there is a $\beta$ that satisfies equation

$$C' (\beta) = \frac{d \tilde{S}^*}{d \beta} = \frac{d \tilde{S}^*}{d S_0} \frac{d S_0}{d \beta} = \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[S_0 + (1 - S_0) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2},$$

then this is a best response for a given $\tilde{\tau}$. Also, note that $C' (1) > 1 > e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)$ such that $\beta = 1$ is never a best response. We now show that there exists a threshold amount of time $\tilde{\tau}$ such that we can find an interior solution $\beta > 0$ that satisfies $C' (\beta) = \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[S_0 + (1 - S_0) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}$ for $\tau \geq \tilde{\tau}$ and the corner solution $C' (0) \geq \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[\varphi_h \alpha + (1 - \varphi_h \alpha) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}$ for $\tau \leq \tilde{\tau}$.

We define $\tilde{\tau}$ as the time that satisfies

$$C' (0) = \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[\varphi_h \alpha + (1 - \varphi_h \alpha) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}.$$ 

At $\tilde{\tau} = 0$, the (RHS) is $1 - \varphi_h \alpha \leq 1$, and furthermore, the (RHS) is concave and maximized at $\tilde{\tau} = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \frac{1 - \varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha}$ at a value of $\frac{1}{2 \varphi_h \alpha}$. Therefore, if $C' (0) < \frac{1}{2 \varphi_h \alpha}$, then there exists a cutoff $\tilde{\tau} \leq \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \frac{1 - \varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha}$ such that for all $\tilde{\tau} \in (0, \bar{\tau})$, $C' (0) > \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[\varphi_h \alpha + (1 - \varphi_h \alpha) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}$, which implies $\beta = 0$. Furthermore, for all $\tilde{\tau} \in [\bar{\tau}, \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \frac{1 - \varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha}]$, $C' (0) \leq \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[\varphi_h \alpha + (1 - \varphi_h \alpha) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}$ and hence, $\exists \beta > 0$ which satisfies $C' (\beta) = \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[S_0 + (1 - S_0) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}$. Otherwise, (i.e., $C' (0) \geq \frac{1}{2 \varphi_h \alpha}$), $C' (0) \geq \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[\varphi_h \alpha + (1 - \varphi_h \alpha) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^2}$ and $\beta = 0$ for all $\tilde{\tau}$.

We now show that there is a unique pair of pure strategies $\{\beta^* (\varphi_h), \tau^* (\varphi_h)\}$ that satisfy the incentive constraint of the firm and the consumers word of mouth constraint for the continuation game from time $t \geq 0$.

**Lemma 5.** For a given level of information acquisition $\varphi_h > 0$, there is a unique pair of pure strategies $\{\beta^* (\varphi_h), \tau^* (\varphi_h)\}$ that satisfy the incentive constraint of the firm and the consumers word of mouth constraint for the continuation game from time $t \geq 0$.\(^{23}\)

\(^{23}\)On the equilibrium path, beliefs are pinned down by Bayesian beliefs; however, any beliefs such that $\beta^*_j (\theta_i = h | \delta, t, \varphi_h, \beta) \alpha$ and $\beta^*_j (\theta_i = h | m, t, \varphi_h, \beta) - \beta^*_j (\theta_i = h | \delta, t, \varphi_h, \beta) \leq k$ for $t > \tau^*$ are possible.
Proof. By definition, \( \beta \) is bounded above by 1, and an upper bound on \( \tau \) for a given \( \varphi_h \) is \( \tau(\varphi_h, 0) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \frac{1-\varphi_h \alpha}{1-\varphi_h \alpha} \). The best response functions \( \{ \tau(\varphi_h, \hat{\beta}), \beta(\varphi_h, \hat{\tau}) \} \) are continuous and map a compact set to a compact set, therefore there exists a fixed point and hence an equilibrium in pure strategies for any \( \varphi_h \) in the continuation game from \( t \geq 0 \).

We note from Lemma 2 that the length of time consumers engage in word of mouth is decreasing in the conjectured level of advertising by the firm \( \frac{dt}{d\beta} < 0 \) for \( \beta \leq \hat{\beta} \leq \frac{\varphi_h \alpha}{k(1-\varphi_h \alpha)} \left(1 - k - \frac{(1-\varphi_h \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h \alpha} \right) \) and constant at zero \( \tau = 0 \) for \( \hat{\beta} \geq \frac{\varphi_h \alpha}{k(1-\varphi_h \alpha)} \left(1 - k - \frac{(1-\varphi_h \alpha)}{1 - \varphi_h \alpha} \right) \). Note that \( \beta(\varphi_h, 0) = 0 \) so that at the point of intersection the diffusion time \( \tau^* > 0 \) and \( \frac{d\tau^*}{d\beta} < 0 \).

If \( C'(0) \geq \frac{1}{2\varphi_h \alpha} \), then using Lemma 4 \( \beta = 0 \) for all \( \hat{\tau} \). Hence, the unique equilibrium is \( \{\tau^*, \beta^*\} = \left\{ \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \frac{1-\varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha}, 0 \right\} \).

We now show that for \( C'(0) < \frac{1}{2\varphi_h \alpha} \) the slope \( \frac{d\beta}{d\tau} \geq 0 \) at any point of intersection where \( \tau^* > 0 \) and \( \beta^* > 0 \).

Implicitly differentiating the equation (24) to find \( \frac{d\beta}{d\tau} \) for \( \beta \in (0, 1) \):

\[
\frac{d\beta}{d\tau} = \lambda \left( 1 - S_0 - e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}} S_0 \right) - 2 S_0 \lambda e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}} \frac{(1-\varphi_h \alpha)e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}}}{(1-1-e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}})S_0} = \lambda \frac{1}{1-0} \frac{1-S_0-e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}} S_0}{(1-1-e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}})S_0} \]

\[
= \frac{C''(\beta) - 2(1-e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}})\frac{(1-\varphi_h \alpha)e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}}}{(1-1-e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}})S_0}}{(1-S_0)(1-S_0)} \]

\[
= \frac{\lambda(1-\varphi_h \alpha)e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}} - 2 S_0 \lambda e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}} (1-\varphi_h \alpha)e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}}}{(1-1-e^{\lambda \hat{\tau}})S_0} \]

\[
= \lambda \frac{1-S_0}{S_0} \frac{1-\varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha} \]

\[
= \lambda \left(1-\varphi_h \alpha\right) \left(1-2S_f \right) \]

\[
C''(\beta) + 2 \left(\frac{1-\varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha} \right) \frac{S_f^2}{S_0^2} \frac{1-\varphi_h \alpha}{\varphi_h \alpha} \]

\[
= \lambda \left(1-\varphi_h \alpha\right) \left(1-2S_f \right) \]

Hence, a sufficient condition for \( \frac{d\beta}{d\tau} > 0 \) is \( \tilde{S}_f < \frac{1}{2} \). At an equilibrium point,

\[
\tilde{S}_f(\varphi_h, \tau^* , \beta^*) = \hat{S}_c(\varphi_h, \tau^*) = S^*_h(\varphi_h, 0) = S^*_h(\varphi_h) = \alpha \left[ \frac{\varphi_h (1-\alpha)}{1-\varphi_h \alpha} \right] < \frac{1}{2}
\]

\( \iff k > \frac{2 \varphi_h \alpha (1-\alpha)}{1-\varphi_h \alpha} = G(\varphi_h | \alpha) \)

We note that \( \frac{\partial G(\varphi_h)}{\partial \varphi_h} = \frac{2 \alpha (1-\alpha)}{(1-\varphi_h \alpha)^2} > 0 \) for all \( \alpha \in (0, 1) \) and thus, \( S^* < \frac{1}{2} \) is true when \( k > 2\alpha = G(1) \). Moreover, the equilibrium is continuous in \( \varphi_h \) because \( \tau(\varphi_h, \hat{\beta}) \) and \( \beta(\varphi_h, \hat{\tau}) \) are also continuous in \( \varphi_h \) for \( \varphi_h > 0 \).

The following lemma proves the first part of Proposition 3 by providing the comparative statics of the cost of advertising on the continuation game from \( t \geq 0 \).

Lemma 6. For a given level of information acquisition \( \varphi_h \), consider two cost functions of advertising \( C_1 \) and \( C_2 \) where \( C'_1 < C'_2 \). When the marginal cost of advertising is larger, the level of advertising is lower and the length of diffusion is longer: \( \beta^*_1(\varphi_h) > \beta^*_2(\varphi_h) \) and \( t^*_1(\varphi_h) < t^*_2(\varphi_h) \).
Proof. Let \( F(\beta) = \frac{e^{-\lambda \beta}(1-\varphi_h \alpha)}{[S_0+(1-S_0)e^{-\lambda \beta}]\varphi} \). \( \frac{\partial F(\beta)}{\partial \beta} = 2 \left(1-e^{-\lambda \beta}\right) \frac{(1-\varphi_h \alpha) e^{-\lambda \beta}}{[S_0+(1-S_0)e^{-\lambda \beta}]^2} > 0 \). Again, the best-response advertising level \( \beta^* \) satisfies \( C'(\beta) = \frac{e^{-\lambda \beta}(1-\varphi_h \alpha)}{[S_0+(1-S_0)e^{-\lambda \beta}]^2} \). Then, \( C'_1(\beta^*_1) = F(\beta^*_1) < C'_2(\beta^*_2) = F(\beta^*_2) \). Hence, \( F(\beta^*_1) < F(\beta^*_2) \iff \beta^*_1(\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau}) > \beta^*_2(\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau}) \) for all \( \tilde{\tau} > \tau_1 \). From Lemma 2 and 5, if \( \tau(\varphi_h, 0) = \frac{1}{k} \ln \frac{-\varphi_h \alpha}{-\varphi_h \alpha} > \tilde{\tau} \), then \( \beta^*_1(\varphi_h) > \beta^*_2(\varphi_h) \) and \( \tau^*_1(\varphi_h) < \tau^*_2(\varphi_h) \). Otherwise, \( \beta^*(\varphi_h) = \beta^*_2(\varphi_h) = 0 \) and \( \tau^*_1(\varphi_h) = \tau^*_2(\varphi_h) = \frac{1}{k} \ln \frac{-\varphi_h \alpha}{-\varphi_h \alpha} \). Finally, \( \tau(\varphi_h, 0) = \tilde{\tau} \) when \( C'_1(0) = \frac{1-a}{k} \left[1 - \frac{-\varphi_h \alpha(1-\alpha)}{k}\right] \), and hence the inequalities hold strictly for \( C'_1(0) < \frac{1-a}{k} \left[1 - \frac{-\varphi_h \alpha(1-\alpha)}{k}\right] \). \( \square \)

Finally, the second part of Proposition 3 follows from the next lemma, which provides the comparative statics of the cost of advertising on the value of acquiring information.

**Lemma 7.** Consider two cost functions of advertising \( C_1 \) and \( C_2 \), where \( 1 < C'_1 < C'_2 \) and \( C'_1(0) < C'_2(0) \). Then

\[
V(\varphi_h, \tau^*_1(\varphi_h), \beta^*_1(\varphi_h)) < V(\varphi_h, \tau^*_2(\varphi_h), \beta^*_2(\varphi_h)).
\]

**Proof.** We note that from Lemma 6, \( \beta^*_1(\varphi_h) > \beta^*_2(\varphi_h) \) and \( \tau^*_1(\varphi_h) < \tau^*_2(\varphi_h) \), and from Lemma 2, \( S^*_1 = S^*_2 \). From equation (9), we can now write \( V(\varphi_h, \tau^*(\varphi_h), \beta^*(\varphi_h)) \) as:

\[
V(\varphi_h, \tau^*(\varphi_h), \beta^*(\varphi_h)) = (1 - \beta^*) \frac{k}{1 - S_0} \left[\frac{S^* - S_0}{S_0} + \ln \frac{S_0}{S^*}\right].
\]

Taking the derivative with respect to \( \beta^* \) holding \( S_0 \) and \( S^* \) constant,

\[
\frac{\partial V}{\partial \beta^*} = -\frac{k}{1 - S_0} \left[\frac{S^* - S_0}{S_0} - \ln \frac{S_0}{S^*}\right] < 0.
\]

And from Lemma 3 in the proof of Proposition 2, \( \frac{\partial V}{\partial S_0} < 0 \), and the lemma follows immediately by noting that \( \frac{dS^*_h}{dS^*_h} > 0 \) and \( \frac{dS^*_h}{dS^*_h} = 0 \).

Now, \( V(\varphi_h, \tau^*(\varphi_h, \beta^*), \beta^*(\varphi_h, \tau^*)) \) is continuous in \( \varphi_h \) and \( \tau \geq \frac{1 - k + k \ln k}{1 - \alpha} = V(1, \tau^*(1, 0), 0) \). Hence, it follows that \( 1 > \varphi_{h2}^* > \varphi_{h1}^* \). Also, \( S^*_1 < S^*_2 \) follows from recalling \( \frac{dS^*_h}{d\varphi_h} > 0 \) from equation (22). Finally, if \( C'_1(0) \geq C = \frac{S^*(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1 - S^*(\varphi_h^*, 0))}{S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1 - S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0))} (1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha) \), the equilibrium for both cost functions is the same, \( \{ \varphi_h^*, \tau^*(\varphi_h^*), 0 \} \).

**A.6 Proof of Proposition 4**

If \( C'(0) \geq \frac{\hat{S}^*_h(\varphi_h^*, \tau^*(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1 - \hat{S}^*_h(\varphi_h^*, \tau^*(\varphi_h^*, 0))))}{S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1 - S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0))} (1 - \varphi_h^* \alpha) \), where \( \tau^*(\varphi_h^*) = \frac{1}{k} \ln \frac{S^*(\varphi_h^*)}{1 - S^*(\varphi_h^*)} - \frac{\varphi_h^* \alpha}{\varphi_h^* \alpha} \), the equilibrium is \( \{ \varphi_h^*, \tau^*(\varphi_h^*), 0 \} \).

Note that choosing \( T > \tau^*(\varphi_h^*) \) will ensure that the diffusion of word of mouth is completed prior to the product being released as to be consistent with our assumption about discounting.
propoision follows from noting that the marginal cost of advertising at the time of information release is \( e^{rT}C'(\beta) \). And when \( T > \frac{1}{r} \ln \frac{S^*(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1-S^*(\varphi_h^*, 0))}{S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1-S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0))} \left( 1-\varphi_h^* \alpha \right) \), we have \( e^{rT}C'(0) > \frac{S^*(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1-S^*(\varphi_h^*, 0))}{S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0)(1-S_0(\varphi_h^*, 0))} \left( 1-\varphi_h^* \alpha \right) \) and we have that \( \beta = 0 \) and \( \varphi_h = \varphi_h^* \).

A.7 Proof of Proposition 5

Suppose \( 0 \leq \beta' < \beta'' \leq S^*(\varphi_h, 0) \). The value of acquiring information may be written a

\[
V(\varphi_h, \beta) = \frac{S^*(\varphi_h, \beta) - S_0(\varphi_h, \beta)}{S_0(\varphi_h, \beta)} - \ln \frac{S^*(\varphi_h, \beta)}{S_0(\varphi_h, \beta)}.
\]

We know from Lemma 2 that \( S^* \) is independent of \( \beta \). We also know from Proposition 2 that \( V \) is decreasing in \( S_0 \), and hence also decreasing in \( \beta \) because

\[
S_0(\varphi_h, \beta) = \varphi_h \alpha + \beta \left( 1 - \varphi_h \right) \alpha + 1 - \alpha.
\]

Therefore, \( V(\varphi_h, \beta') > V(\varphi_h, \beta'') \).

The cutoff high type that acquires information is the largest solution to

\[
\varphi_h^*(\beta) = \frac{V(\varphi_h^*, \beta)}{C(\beta)}.
\]

It is then immediate from the above that for higher values of \( \beta \), \( V(\varphi_h, \beta) \) is smaller for all \( \varphi_h \). Hence, the fixed point satisfying the relationship in equation (25) is also lower, thus \( \varphi_h(\beta') > \varphi_h(\beta'') \). We also know that \( \frac{dS^*}{d\varphi_h} > 0 \) from the proof of Proposition 1, so we can also conclude \( S^*(\varphi_h^*(\beta'), \beta') = S^*(\varphi_h^*(\beta'), 0) > S^*(\varphi_h^*(\beta'), 0) = S^*(\varphi_h^*(\beta''), \beta'') \).

B Trembling hand refinement in advertising section

The analysis in section 4 assumed that the level of advertising is unobserved by individuals, and analyzes the firm’s advertising decision and the consumer’s choice of a time to stop spreading information as a simultaneous move game. In any equilibrium in which \( 0 < \beta^* < 1 \), receiving or not receiving an advertisement are both consistent with the firm’s equilibrium strategy. Thus, consumers’ beliefs upon seeing or not seeing an advertisement are pinned down by Bayesian updating, and their beliefs are the same in both scenarios. For example, if the consumer believes that the firm sent out an advertisement to 10% of the population, the fact that she did or did not receive an advertisement does not change her prior belief. Therefore, the equilibria we find when analyzing the subgame from \( t \geq 0 \) onward as a simultaneous move game are perfectly consistent with this analysis. On the other hand, in an equilibrium in which \( \beta^* = 0 \), consumers expect a zero probability of receiving an advertisement. Hence,
Bayesian updating does not provide any guidance for pinning down consumers’ off-equilibrium beliefs when consumers actually observe an advertisement in these equilibria. In this appendix, we analyze a trembling-hand perfect equilibrium.

Prior to mixing, consumers may or may not receive the advertisement from the firm and may potentially condition the time at which they choose to stop passing on word of mouth on this. Thus, the strategy \( \tau \) of each consumer is a function of whether the consumer received an advertisement. We denote this occurrence by \( a = 0, 1 \), where \( a = 1 \) indicates a consumer who received an advertisement.

The tremble we analyze is on the firm’s advertising strategy. We assume that when the firm chooses an advertising level \( \beta \), then with probability \( e \), individuals in the fraction of the population advertised do not receive the advertisement, and with the same probability \( e \), the fraction not advertised to do receive the advertisement. Thus, when the firm chooses a level \( \beta \in [0,1] \), the actual fraction that receives the advertisement is \( \beta (1-e) + e (1-\beta) = \beta + e - 2e \beta \). This ensures that when the firm chooses \( \beta^* = 0, 1 \), the actual level of advertising is \( e \) and \( 1 - e \), respectively, and Bayesian updating can be used at each information set \( a = 0, 1 \) of consumers. Hence, the updated beliefs of consumers \( \tilde{\beta} (a) \) will be the same for \( a = 0, 1 \), and we can proceed by denoting it by just \( \tilde{\beta} \). We can now write out the consumers’ best response in terms of \( \tilde{\beta} \) and \( e \). Importantly, the conjectured level of “effective” advertising after accounting for the tremble is the same at both information sets \( a = 0, 1 \), and the best response is independent of \( a \). The best-response function of consumers is now given by

\[
\tau^* (a, \varphi_h, \bar{\beta} + e - 2e \tilde{\beta}) = \frac{1}{\lambda} \ln \left( \frac{\tilde{S}_e^* (\varphi_h, 0, \bar{\beta} + e - 2e \tilde{\beta})}{1 - \tilde{S}_e^* (\varphi_h, 0, \bar{\beta} + e - 2e \tilde{\beta})} \right) \frac{1 - S_0 (\varphi_h, 0, \bar{\beta} + e - 2e \tilde{\beta})}{S_0 (\varphi_h, 0, \bar{\beta} + e - 2e \tilde{\beta})}.
\]

The firm’s choice of advertising cannot directly influence consumers’ strategy and is very similar to earlier. But we replace \( \beta \) with the “effective” advertising \( \bar{\beta} + e - 2e \tilde{\beta} \) on the RHS:

\[
C' (\beta (\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau})) = \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{\left[ S_0 (\varphi_h, 0, \beta (\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau}) + e - 2e \beta (\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau})) + (1 - S_0 (\varphi_h, 0, \beta (\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau}) + e - 2e \beta (\varphi_h, \tilde{\tau})) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} \right]^{2}} \text{ if } \beta^* \in (0, 1)
\]

and

\[
C' (0) \geq \frac{e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}} (1 - \varphi_h \alpha)}{[S_0 (\varphi_h, 0, e) + (1 - S_0 (\varphi_h, 0, e)) e^{-\lambda \tilde{\tau}}]^{2}} \text{ if } \beta^* = 0.
\]

The information acquisition choice of consumers satisfies:

\[
\varphi^* = V (\varphi^*, \tau^* (\varphi^*), \beta^* (\varphi^*) + e - 2e \beta^* (\varphi^*)) \text{ if } V (1, \tau^* (1), \beta^* (1)) < \bar{c} \text{ if } V (1, \tau^* (1), \beta^* (1) + e - 2e \beta^* (1)) \geq \bar{c}.
\]

\[
\varphi^* = 1 \text{ if } V (1, \tau^* (1), \beta^* (1) + e - 2e \beta^* (1)) \geq \bar{c}.
\]
We are interested in the limit of the equilibria as $\epsilon \to 0$. We note equations (26), (27), and (28) are continuous in $\epsilon$ at $\epsilon = 0$. Thus, the best-response functions go to the best-response functions in section 4, and the limit of the equilibria is the same. Similarly, equation (29) is continuous in all its arguments and thus also attains the same limit as in section 4.

B.1 Other refinements

As before, if there are multiple solutions to the consumer’s problem, we assume the firm can implement the solution that results in the greatest level of information diffusion. The beliefs are Bayesian on the equilibrium path for $t \leq \tau^*$, and satisfy $b_j^*(\theta_i = h|m,t) - b_j^*(\theta_i = h|\emptyset, t) < k$ for all $t > \tau^*$. Finally, we maintain the assumptions that $\bar{\tau} \geq \frac{1-k+k\ln k}{1-\alpha}$, which guarantees that not all the high social types acquire information in equilibrium, and $k \geq 2\alpha$, which is a sufficient condition for uniqueness of an equilibrium in the continuation game from $t \geq 0$. We require uniqueness in order to undertake comparative static analysis of the firm’s costs of advertising on the equilibrium.
References


