Source Effects in the Revelation of Positive Information

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Revealing negative or deprecating information about oneself before another person can is a tactic known as stealing thunder. In research, this tactic has proven effective at diminishing the impact of the information and altering the consequences for a target that would have occurred had the target let another person reveal the same information (White, Williams, Joe, & Prince, 2001; Williams, Bourgeois, & Croyle, 1993). New information is regarded as valuable (e.g., Stock & Bannan, 1992). When a person acquires new information, they have "ownership" of that information, until it is no longer new information. The present work examines stealing thunder in the new domain of stealing spotlight, the revelation of positive information. Participants read a fake campaign-related news article in which it was revealed that a person would be the first blind candidate for mayor of a city in another state. The candidacy was first revealed by the candidate himself, a rival opponent, or a neutral source. Participants then rated the likelihood to vote for each candidate separately. The results showed that when the opponent revealed the information first (thus, stealing the spotlight), participants were not only less likely to vote for the opponent, but were more likely to vote for the blind candidate. This likelihood to vote for the blind candidate when his spotlight was stolen was even higher than participants' likelihood to vote for him when the candidate makes the announcement himself. Future research is needed to understand why stealing the spotlight backfired. One possibility is that when a person attempts to steal the spotlight and there are potential negative consequences for the other person, negative attributions are formed about the person stealing spotlight.

References