

# Narrating Negative Experiences on Behalf of Self vs. Others: Use of Passive Voice

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## **Abstract**

People often share past experiences, either their own or on behalf of others. Little is known about how linguistic patterns (i.e., syntax) differ when narrating for oneself versus for others. This research investigates this distinction, focusing on the use of passive voice—a syntactic choice associated with psychological distance. Using a multimethod approach, including an analysis of 39,593 real-world complaints and two experiments, we demonstrate that narrators use more passive voice when speaking on behalf of others. Moreover, incident severity moderates this effect: while both advocating for others and narrating severe incidents independently increase passive voice usage, their combined effect is compensatory rather than additive. These findings advance our understanding of how psychological distance and incident severity influence linguistic structure.

**Keywords:** *narrations, psychological distance, passive voice*

**Track:** *Consumer Behavior*