The Influence of Online Web Reviews on Consumers' Purchase Intention

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Abstract

Consumers' willingness to buy is usually influenced by many factors, and online reviews have become one of the most important influencing factors. This paper uses literature research and simple case studies to describe the definition, classification, and development process of online reviews, and then analyzes the mechanisms by which online web reviews influence consumers' purchase intentions, and in doing so, summarizes the significance of this influence of online web reviews for companies and consumers.

Key words: online reviews, consumer purchase intention, case study

1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing level of global information technology and the continuous upgrading of consumption, online purchase of goods has become an important consumption method for today's consumers. Many websites (Taobao, Jingdong, etc.) have also established online review systems to encourage consumers to post reviews of their products. Online reviews are one of the most important categories of product word-of-mouth. According to the Statistical Report on the Development of the Internet in China, the size of online shopping users in China is as high as 989 million[1], of which the attention to product word-of-mouth is as high as 77.5% [2], and this attention is on the rise year by year.[3] Online reviews act as a useful supplement to product information, ensuring that consumers make decisions after fully understanding information about the product, reducing the difficulty and purchase risk of evaluating the product and expected comparisons, and solving the problem that consumers cannot directly touch the online product. At the same time, online reviews can help consumers avoid being cheated to a certain extent if there are unscrupulous merchants who use the Internet to sell counterfeit and substandard goods that do not match the quality and price. This not only helps consumers make better consumption decisions and have a higher probability of picking the goods they like. For companies, it also increases the motivation of people to shop online. On the other hand, online reviews also play an important role in boosting product sales. One study found that a 1% increase in ratings from online reviews boosted hotel sales by 2.6 percentage points.[4] Compared with advertising, online reviews are less costly and more credible, giving products more influence and persuasiveness, stimulating potential consumers' desire to buy, helping to increase the number of goods sold and promoting the development of the online shopping market.

2. OVERVIEW OF ONLINE REVIEWS

2.1 Definition

Online reviews are consumer comments about goods or services posted on the web through Internet platforms.[5] It is one of the most important forms of online word-of-mouth communication and the best way for consumers to understand the quality and performance of products without touching the physical products. Compared with various product promotions, online reviews come from individual consumers and are more persuasive and time-sensitive as they provide immediate personal evaluations and feelings about the products, thus attracting the attention of both companies and consumers.

2.2 Development process

In 2005, the term Web 2.0 was officially introduced, which is a generalization of the phenomenon of Internet users' participation in contributing to Internet content within a certain period of time. Users' communication is no longer limited by time and geography. A greater

percentage of content generation for online reviews has been given to users, allowing them to freely share their experiences and ideas and communicate with each other. This led to the rapid growth of online shopping platforms and an increase in the number and variety of online reviews during this period.[6]

In the early days of online review systems, most online reviews existed in the form of ratings. Consumers simply selected a score within the merchant's defined range, and the merchant would then calculate the average score of all reviews as the consumer's rating of the product. However, this does not avoid the fact that most products are over-rated, which reduces the utility value of the product's review score. As online reviews continue to evolve and change, text reviews have also appeared in the public eye. However, the influx of spam and some abnormal means of review manipulation has also made the information overload problem in the online review system severe. To solve these problems, most online shopping sites have made adjustments accordingly.[7]

First, about the information perspective. In terms of review content, some online shopping platforms are starting to ask consumers to rate products in multiple dimensions, such as performance, appearance, cost effectiveness, and after-sales service, or to post double-sided reviews that include both positive and negative information about the product. This can help consumers understand the objective situation of the product and the subjective feelings of the reviewer from multiple perspectives, and understand the merits and problems of the product. In terms of reviewer ratings, some online shopping sites provide membership information or grant special identification to users of quality reviews, such as the "Top 100 Reviewers" title on Amazon.com. This not only helps consumers identify the reliability of reviewers when referring to reviews, but also gives recognition to quality reviewers. At the same time enhance consumer's sense of belonging to the site, encourages other consumers to post better reviews, and improves the online review system environment. In terms of filtering diversity, the online shopping platform provides "review posting time order", "review usefulness", "review hotness", and "reviewer credit". The online shopping platform provides review ranking methods such as "reviewer credit ranking". This help merchants to provide consumers a variety of valid reviews, reduces the excessive influence of negative reviews on consumers, and makes online reviews more objective.

Second, about the consumer perspective. As consumers' reliance on online reviews continues to increase and the number of online reviews in online shopping sites begins to grow, thus consumers begin to pay more attention to the content of online reviews. Although extreme reviews (very high and very low ratings) remain more useful than medium ratings, consumers pay more attention to medium-rated reviews

for experience-based products. This phenomenon indicates a decreasing trend of consumers' concern about the validity of reviews. At the same time, the emergence of membership level information and the granting of special identification to some users of quality reviews has led consumers to expect reputation and recognition by posting quality reviews, which has improved the quality of consumers' reviews.

Third, about the management of reviews perspective. In response to spam and some unorthodox means of review manipulation, online shopping site operators have chosen to solve the problem by increasing consumer participation and cooperation in reviews. In terms of participation, operators have designed more comprehensive incentives to encourage consumers to create good reviews, such as reward points for reviews and rankings of good reviewers. In terms of collaboration, operators use online product review communities, such as blogs and group chats, to engage consumers in discussions and to expand the reach of quality reviewers.

2.3 Classification

There are a large number of online reviews, and over time, many types of online reviews have evolved.

First, online reviews can be divided into two forms: text and picture. Reviewers can not only review products in text, but also by uploading their own pictures of the products. Text reviews are usually more concise and detailed, allowing consumers to make decisions based on the attitudes and opinions of other consumers.[8] Picture reviews allow consumers to get a direct visual impression of the product. Studies have shown that there are differences in the effects of text reviews and image reviews on consumers. Text reviews have a greater impact on consumers' purchase intentions in the distant future, while image reviews have a greater impact on consumers' purchase intentions in the near future.[9] For example, in the comment section of the "NIKE AIR FORCE 1'07 ESS" product in the official flagship store of Nike on Taobao, the anonymous netizen "t*8" posted a comment on March 8, 2022 at 21:19 The comment was released at 19:00 on March 8, 2022: "The actual test of their own concern about several issues, I hope it will help you. The heel is 4cm (outsole to vamp 11.5cm, insole to vamp 7.5cm). The shoe size is very accurate. The comfort of the shoe is a little bit pressure on the back of the foot, which is acceptable. In terms of wearability, the upper has obvious wrinkles after one day of wear (as shown in the picture). The height increase cushion is only suitable for 1.5cm internal height increase, 2.5cm internal height increase will be very difficult to wear, and the comfort level drops sharply; if you are ready to pad 1.5cm internal height increase cushion, the shoes need to buy half a size larger." He also attached a photo of the shoes he took under the review (shown in Figure 1). At the same

time, the merchant also gave the commenter a reply: "Dear t**8, thank you for purchasing AIR FORCE 1'07 ESS women's sneakers. Thank you very much for your support and love of NIKE, NIKE from packaging to products are designed with care it, look forward to your visit again, may NIKE products and services, make your life better." Such a review not only allows consumers to browse the comments to understand the various angles of the evaluation of the goods, the business response also allows consumers to experience the business quality, attentive service attitude, improve the consumer's goodwill and willingness to buy merchants and goods.

Figure 1 The reviewer purchased the NIKE AIR FORCE 1'07 ESS women's shoes

Second, as a type of review that consumers are free to post, online reviews can also be divided into positive and negative reviews. Positive reviews refer to comments posted by consumers about their positive impressions of a product. The opposite is true for negative reviews. Two-sided reviews occur because consumers usually have different perceptions and expectations of products, and when expectations differ from real experiences, consumer satisfaction is affected and therefore opposite reviews occur. The simultaneous existence of two-sided reviews makes all reviews about a product more authentic and objective, increasing consumers' trust in the merchant and their willingness to use online reviews as a basis for decision making. Positive reviews can help merchants create a positive image in the consumer's psyche, while negative reviews can reduce consumers' willingness to buy.[10]

For example, in Taobao's "Cuihualaile" store "American vintage sweater women's long sleeves" in the comments section of the goods have a total of more than 20,000 comments. Among them, there are 22,000 positive comments, 119 comments and bad comments. Anonymous netizen "t**3" in February 15, 2022 21:06 posted a positive review said: "clothes and the real thing is quite like, there is nothing to step on the mine point, logistics is also very fast, service attitude is also good, the color is quite positive, quite comfortable, no odor when unpacked, recommended to buy. Buy not to lose, buy the beauty, set the beauty of the people, do not hesitate to buy it!" To the consumer conveyed this commodity not only the physical quality is good, the business service attitude is also very good information, highly recommended

to consumers to buy. This positive review has a total of 12,984 views, 7 people clicked on the "useful" option. However, the netizen "I * * * God" in February 17, 2022 at 14:27 released a bad review said: "Just run away, this dress is really too ugly, it is very thin, the fabric is also difficult to say, is the kind of touch up slippery and a little reflective, not cotton, but also not at all oversize I am 95 kg wear L size like a spiritual guy." This bad review has 816 views, 2 people clicked on the "useful" option. It conveys to consumers the information that the quality of workmanship is poor, the thickness is not suitable, and the size is not accurate. Consumers will evaluate the product again after viewing the review and decide whether to purchase it.

Third, post-purchase online reviews by consumers in the broadest sense also include responses by merchants to consumer reviews. Such responses are generally more useful for negative consumer reviews. When a consumer reads a negative review, he is highly likely to abandon the original purchase decision. If the merchant intervenes at this point to provide a reasonable response, it can greatly reduce the perceived risk of the consumer, lower the negative impression of the product, maintain the original purchase decision, and have a positive impact on both sales and satisfaction of the product.[11]

For the previous example of "American vintage sweater women's long sleeves" bad reviews of goods, the merchant did not respond directly below the comments. But when consumers ask the merchant customer service questions about the physical quality of goods and how to respond to the bad reviews, the merchant replied: "Miss, we are a few years old store, the clothes fabric are selected by our own, the late strict grasp inspection is also very strict, please rest assured the purchase! The quality of the clothes depends on your personal preference. You can buy them and try them on. If you don't like them, you can haul them for free." Such a response allows consumers to transfer the negative impact of the goods to a different personal vision, redeeming the image of the goods. The "free return" protection policy also allows consumers to make purchase decisions more decisive and reassuring, increasing the willingness of consumers to buy.

3. FACTORS INFLUENCING ONLINE REVIEWS ON CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTION

3.1 Online review source factors

The credibility of the website or merchant from which an online review originates refers to the quality and reputation of the website or merchant from which the review information originates, which usually influences consumers' attitudes and willingness to adopt when viewing online reviews. In general, online reviews from websites with high authority and official certification was

usually more persuasive. Some studies have found that online reviews published on more reputable sites have a greater impact on consumers' purchase intentions. Also, experience goods are more influenced by the credibility of the source website or company, which consumers usually rely on to make purchase decisions.[12]

The reliability of reviewers of online reviews refers to the level of credibility and utilization value of their review information that helps consumers to better understand the product and make decisions. It has been shown that reliability has an effective effect on consumers' intention to use information online behaviour.[13] The reliability of online reviewers can be demonstrated by the special identification of users who have been granted high membership level information or quality reviews, which facilitates consumers to identify highly reliable reviews and thus receive higher quality reviews. However, the reliability of online reviewers does not necessarily influence their purchase intention. This is because even highly reliable reviewers may make negative comments about products and reduce consumers' purchase intentions.

The expertise of reviewers of online reviews includes their knowledge of the product expertise, experience in using the product, etc. The professionalism of online reviews increases the level of trust consumers have in the reviews. Professional reviewers usually possess more knowledge about the product and therefore post reviews that are more valuable to utilize. Also, if consumers have more homogeneity with the reviewer, i.e., they have more similarities, and if the review is positive, consumers' purchase intention will increase because they are more likely to refer to the reviews of people similar to themselves.[14]

3.2 Online reviews own factors

The quality of online reviews refers to the persuasive strength of the message, which can usually be judged in terms of the relevance, adequacy, objectivity, and comprehensibility of the review content. The quality of the information is quite important to the review recipient. High-quality comments can quickly meet the decision needs of the comment recipient. Low-quality reviews, on the other hand, do not contribute anything to consumers' decision making. It has been found that when the quality of online reviews is higher, the more comprehensive the reviews are, the higher the satisfaction of consumers and thus their purchase intention.[15]

The time of an online review refers to the time of the review and reflects the timeliness of the review. The earlier the review time of an online review, the less time-sensitive it is, and the less value it has for use. Therefore, even if the content of online reviews is excellent, it does not necessarily influence the purchase intention. This is because as time progresses and society evolves, people's

values and quality of life change, and their attitudes and evaluations of goods shift.

The number of online reviews refers to the number of consumer reviews for a specific product and is a visual factor that reflects the consumer's willingness to purchase after browsing the product. The number of online reviews directly shows the number of consumers who have purchased the product, reflected the popularity of the product and acted to build consumers' first impressions of the product. A higher number of online reviews indicates that more consumers are involved in the discussion about the item, increasing the curiosity of potential consumers about the item and thus their willingness to purchase it. It has been suggested that less experienced consumers usually base their decisions more on the number of online reviews.[16] The number of online reviews is usually analysed in terms of the dimension of the number of positive and negative reviews. A study found that in the book market, the star ratings given by consumers in reviews are more likely to influence the sales of books.[17] Also, when the number of reviews for a book increases by 1%, the sales ranking of that book increases by 0.44%. However, although the number of online reviews positively affects consumers' purchase intentions, one study found that the number of reviews does not directly increase consumers' purchase intentions and thus product sales, i.e., its two are not linearly related.[18] This is because the number of reviews does not motivate consumers to make a decision directly after learning about the product. Typically, the number of online reviews for an item is generally greater than two digits, so consumers read some reviews selectively rather than all. This is where a "useful" or "useless" vote on a review can be more helpful to consumers in making a purchase decision. A "useful" vote puts high-value reviews at the top and helps consumers cope with information overload through review usefulness.

The length of an online review refers to the number of words in the online review. The higher the number of words, the richer the review is and the more information consumers can learn about the product from it. However, some studies have also shown that reviews with fewer words are better for consumers to read and understand, making it easier for consumers to quickly capture useful information. Therefore, the length of online reviews does not affect the usefulness of the reviews and is not related to consumers' willingness to purchase.

The validity of online reviews refers to the consumer's attitude toward a specific product. When a higher rating is given to an item, it means that consumers hold a more positive attitude toward the item. Studies have found that the impact of low rated reviews can be much greater than high rated reviews. And high ratings usually have two kinds of impact on merchants: positive impact and no impact. Generally speaking, the higher the average rating of an item, the more positive the consumer's attitude

toward the item, thus increasing the consumer's interest in purchasing and ultimately boosting sales. In contrast, the lower the average rating, the lower the consumer's interest in purchasing, or even abandoning the purchase.[19] The positive and negative ratings reflect the consumer's satisfaction level with the product and also side-by-side reflect their positive and negative emotional tendencies. Again, through these positive and negative emotions, the strengths and weaknesses of the merchandise are shown to other consumers. Studies have shown that negative consumer reviews have a much greater impact than positive reviews in online reviews, i.e., they have a "negative bias" effect. This is because negative reviews generally have a direct impact on consumers' willingness to buy and trust in the product, affecting sales and the reputation of the merchant. If the review is for a product in an auction market, negative reviews may directly affect the price of the product and the likelihood of consumers entering the auction market. And, for lesser-known items, negative reviews can, to a large extent, directly affect sales. The continuous spread of negative reviews can deepen consumers' negative impressions of the item or even the merchant, causing its online reputation to continue to decline. Among online reviews, text reviews are one of the main ways to reflect their validity. Through text, consumers can directly feel the emotions of the reviewer such as anger, satisfaction, etc.

3.3 Online review recipient factors

The expertise of the recipient of an online review is whether he or she has knowledge of the item or whether he or she has the ability to judge whether the source is providing correct information. Online review recipients judge whether the information in a review is of value based on their knowledge. Therefore, when the expertise of online review recipients is stronger, the less influence the review content has on their purchase intention. However, it has also been argued that because their expertise enhances their ability to analyze the review content, it also reduces the cost of the recipients' knowledge of the goods, allowing them to make decisions in a shorter period of time. In some ways, therefore, the expertise of online review recipients has a positive effect on reviews. The stronger the expertise of online review recipients, the greater the influence of review content on their purchase intention. [20]

Online review recipients' product involvement refers to the extent to which consumers know about the product, or whether they have experience with the product. It has been suggested that consumers with high product involvement usually decide whether they agree with an online review based on the quality of the review and then make their consumption decisions. Consumers with low product involvement are not influenced by the quality of

online reviews and tend to agree directly with the reviewer's opinion.[21]

Online review recipients' online experience refers to consumers' proficiency in using the Web. Consumers with high online experience have the confidence to find high-quality products and are usually more likely to browse online reviews before using the Web to search for information to determine the accuracy of the review information. Therefore, they usually have low trust in online reviews and online reviews do not influence their purchase intentions.

4. INSPIRATION FOR COMPANIES AND CONSUMERS

Nowadays, most companies have established good online review systems.[22] And as the products continue to be hot, there are hundreds of reviews of popular products. However, the problem of information overload increases the search cost and time cost for consumers to purchase products. Therefore, companies should select and rank reviews with higher value for consumers to view to assist in decision making, recommend targeted reviews, and continuously improve their review system to meet consumers' needs and facilitate their purchases. At the same time, it is necessary to enhance the impact of online review content on consumers' purchase intentions and encourage more high-quality review information to build an excellent corporate image and thus increase their product sales. At the same time, merchants' responses to consumer reviews also play a significant role in influencing consumers' attitudes toward the product. A reasonable response to a consumer's review can greatly increase the consumer's favorability or reduce the negative impression of the product. Therefore, companies should pay attention to consumer feedback and make timely feedback to solve consumer problems and dissatisfaction, and improve the product problems.

As recipients of online reviews, consumers should improve their professional ability, online experience and product involvement to browse online reviews and make consumer decisions more rationally. As reviewers of online reviews, consumers should improve their own professional abilities and the reliability of their reviews, at the same time improve their understanding of products, write more comprehensive, objective, and utilizable reviews, and increase the influence of reviews.

5. CONCLUSION

With the development of society, e-commerce is gradually accepted by more and more consumers, changing people's shopping habits and lifestyles. Online reviews have been adopted and used by consumers as an extremely important information transfer and communication method to help them make consumer decisions and reduce the uncertainty in online purchases.

This purchase step has become an indispensable part of online shopping. Therefore, it is of great practical importance to study the impact of online reviews on consumers' purchase intention.

In the online shopping environment, online reviews play an important role in the consumer's shopping decision process. With the increased frequency of online shopping by consumers and the integration of offline and online channels by companies, the number of online reviews is growing larger and more important by the day. Therefore, this study analysed the impact of online reviews mechanism of consumer purchase intention, and concluded, the source of high reputation website online reviews, online comments of reviewers' professional ability is strong, online reviews are of good quality, the number of online reviews, more positive online comment is the factors that can increase the influence of consumers' purchase intention. All of this provides practical guidance for businesses and consumers.

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